

2017 number 1



pentagram

Lectorium Rosicrucianum

Road of the stars



pentagram

A true Rosicrucian

Three animals has he tamed:
The lion, hence his patience;
The bear, hence his friendliness;
The snake of his lower nature and he is therefore free of all jealousy.
Three virtues has he acquired:
Faith in what he knows and trust in the promise of the King;
A strong Hope based on his knowledge of the Law as well as his acknowledgement of the good in everything;
As well as Love towards the Justice in all that happens and thus it is that he never judges the shortcomings of others or falls victim to garrulousness.

He will never boast because he knows he is an instrument of God
He knows how to be silent because he is obedient to his inner King.
Striving to fulfill his duty and thus reflecting his inner journey of the soul outwardly, there is no disarray in his life.

Inclined to form a high opinion of others, he will seek the good in all and everything.

He will never think badly of others, knowing that every circumstance is an opportunity for inner growth,.

Tranquil within himself he will not impose himself on others. He spurns vanity.

He is more concerned for the wellbeing of others than for his own.

He pursues no personal advantage and is thus free of ambition.

His faith is based on an acknowledgement of the inner truth and thus he can not be deceived by delusions of the dialectical world. It makes him free of irritability.

Sorrow cannot overwhelm him because resistance builds strength.

He will forever remain connected with the group of those that live the truth.



Cover

Night sky over California (anonymous)

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The Universe has neither circumference nor centre. If there were a centre and a circumference, then something outside of the world would exist, which is not the case. It is an impossibility that the Universe could be defined by a physical centre and a physical border, and it is not in

our power to understand the Universe, of which God is both the centre and the circumference. And although the Universe cannot be infinite, it also can't be seen as finite because there are no borders to limit it.

Nicolas de Cusa (1401-1464)



A. GADAL

A time is coming when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem Yet a
time is coming and has now come when the true
worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit
and in truth, Gospel of John 4:23

The Visions of the Great Ones

From time to time, on sunny days, the patriarch came to the cave that was called the Hermit. Then he took Matthew, Guilhem (William) and some of their friends to the cave called the Grand Père (the grandfather) by simply walking around a sharply protruding part of the mountain.

The Grand Père was a jewel, a small round cave, the walls of which were covered with all kinds of mysterious drawings and symbols. At the end of it could be found a large druid circle with a covered passage and numerous separate chambers.

A high platform in the form of a crescent, called 'the table', was covered with profound symbols and there were some seats for an audience. The patriarch even showed them a beautiful pentacle hewn out in the rock which did not look very old, but who knows?

'This is the place where my own 'ancient' (older brother/mentor) began his mission', he said, and knelt before the table, stretching out his open hands on the sacred stone and praying in long silent meditation. 'Never forget', he added, 'to come here from time to time to receive extra strength.'

At first it seemed difficult to distinguish between the various symbols that were drawn over and through each other as they appeared on every wall of the Grand Père. But the patriarch was so skilled and experienced in these studies and so self-confident in his lessons that Matthew

was amazed how adroitly he explained them, using his pointer. Enraptured, he listened.

In this way he soon became familiar with the old symbols and monograms: the resch, the iesmon, the chrismon, the iesmon-resch, the ieschrismon-resch, the eternal circle, the alpha and the omega, the shining pentalpha or star of the Magi, the microcosm and the macrocosm. He became familiar with the first rallying signs of the early Christians, the Christians of the seven churches of Asia as well as the Greek, African and Roman Christians. He studied the apostolic cryptography, the secret monograms, diagrams, trigrams and initials, the numerous different symbols of the first centuries of the Christian era, and monograms even from before the Christian era.

Eagerly he followed his master who, by means of drawings on the rock wall, went back as far as the original grandpère who proclaimed the immortality of the soul in this cave that was later named after him: the male and female aspects of the eternal One which, in perfect unity with the seven-branched tree of Life, embodies the supreme Being; the perpetual sacrifice of the creation of the universe through the self-sacrifice of the supreme Being; the Father, the male aspect of the eternal One; the Mother, the female aspect of the eternal One; the Son, the tree of Life, the creative Word;

FROM: ON THE PATH
OF THE HOLY GRAIL
BY A. GADAL

the Trinity: Aum.

After these wonderful lessons he made rapid progress. He spent many hours in study:

with Rama on Mount Albori;

with Krishna on Mount Meru;

with Hermes in the deep caves of Memphis or Thebes;

with Moses on the rocks of Serbal;

with Orpheus on Mount Kaukaion;

with Pythagoras at Delphi;

with Plato in his Academy;

with Jesus, the divine Master, on the Mount.

And he went even further. For he enjoyed immersing himself in ever deeper contemplation, in extraordinary visions.

The vision of Rama under an oak tree in a clearing in the forest. Rama is asleep when he hears a powerful voice calling his name. An impressive figure dressed in white stands before him. He carries a small stick with a serpent coiled around it as well as a golden sickle. He directs Rama to a mistletoe and later to a torch and a chalice.

And he hears the words of the Genie, the Light-bearer: 'Rama, do you see this torch? It is the sacred Fire of the divine Spirit. Do you see this chalice? Hand the torch to the man and the chalice to the woman for it is the chalice of Life and Love.'

The vision of Krishna in the hut of the centenarian Vasichta, deep in the holy forest. Matthew also felt himself lifted up to the seventh heaven of the Devas, to the Father of all beings. He saw Devaki, the virgin Mother who, beholding the divine Love, received the Son, the creative Word.

The vision of Hermes in a secret tomb, surrounded by Magi and Hierophants. Matthew saw Osiris, the highest Intel-



Look on the Ariege valley from the Eglises, Ussat-Ornolac

ligence, and the seven rays of the Word that is Light, corresponding to a phase of Soul-life. He saw the seven Genii of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; he recognized and listened to the Voice of the Light; he read in the Egyptian Book of the Dead about the souls and how, after a shorter or longer time, according to their state of purity,

they sailed to the Light in the barque of Isis.

The vision of Moses on top of Mount Sinai near the entrance to the cave, protected by terebinth trees (turpentine tree). He saw the Angel of the Sun, a ray of the Elohim, and he

heard its voice dissolve in infinite space: 'I am who I am.'

The vision of Orpheus, high priest of the temple of Mount Kaukaion. Matthew drank in his words when he heard how Orpheus proclaimed that there is one unique Being, the divine Husband-Wife, the Father-Mother, the demi-Ourgos whose son is Dionysos; he followed the Word into the cave of Persephone, Maia the beautiful Weaver, the divine Virgin. He remembered Orpheus' statement: 'Arduous is the way to heaven' and Matthew translated this to his own situation: 'Hard is the path to the holy Grail.'

The vision of Pythagoras on the hill with the terebinth and olive trees at Croton. He followed the tests of initiation, derived from the Egyptian initiation, the key to the Cosmos. He became one with the four elements: earth, air, water and fire, and grasped the essence of the fifth etheric element, the cosmic fluid, the astral light, the World-Soul.

The vision of Plato in his Academy of Athens after he had understood the philosophers of Asia Minor, Egypt and southern Italy, where Pythagoras already had many followers. With him, he studied the sacred numbers, esoteric cosmogony, the doctrine of the soul, the microcosm and the Macrocosm, the wanderings of the human soul and the divine soul, the True, the Beautiful, the Good; and finally he followed this Master into the Eleusinian mysteries.

The vision of Jesus Here Matthew proved how much he had already grown spiritually. Here he had only to consult his memory.

The Egyptian priests, guided by Ahmosi the high priest, had announced that the

Resch		God (Hoofd)	9999	God de Vader	PPPP	God de Zoon
Cirkel.Ain	○	Eeuwigheid				
Chrismon	XC	Christus				
Jesmon	I —	Jezus				
Caput Uas. Uat	UV nX	Leven Begin Dood Einde				
Alpha	αAA	Begin				
Omega	ωΩΩ	Einde				
Soter	SΩ	Verlosser				

The medieval man had a great receptiveness of the heart, which is strongly linked to the intuitive, visual thinking. To familiarize themselves with the more abstract concepts the bons hommes used the ancient language of symbols, as it was transferred from the pre-Christian and early Christian times. One could better describe these symbols as 'characters', similar to the Chinese written language. As an example we can mention for example the vertical line, the Resch, which refers to the divine descending impulse. Resch means God, or 'head', in the sense of divine consciousness. When the Resch was signed as a capital P it meant God the Son, when it was shown in the mirror image, then it meant God the Father. We see the Hebrew character A'in, also referred to as Ain Soph, the circle of eternity. Furthermore, we find the characters X and C, both referring to Christ, and M, referring to the Mater Materia, Mother. The S or Soter, meaning 'savior' or liberator, A or Alpha and Omega or Ω, and of course the pentacle, the five-pointed star that refers to the reborn soul state.

By forming ever changing compositions one could explain in each case a different facet.

phoenix would rise from its ashes.

John the Baptist, who sensed that his role was nearly finished, spoke of Jesus: 'He must increase while I must decrease.'

Jesus could only turn inward for his initiation and, for a period of forty days of fasting withdraw into an eagle's nest in a cave in the Engaddi mountains where he found the Reflections of the Prophets, a little fresh water, nuts and figs. And just as his divine Master, Matthew also cried out in ecstasy: 'I accept the cross so that the world may be saved.'

Is it necessary to add that Matthew had reached the stage of his rebirth? The patriarch realised this and told him that he would soon be introduced to the knowledge of the laws that govern the use of

the symbolic Water so that he would possess the gift of prediction and prophecy. Matthew's joy was great. He understood that the moment of his ordination, of his achieving Perfection, was approaching. But he still had to pass through the purification by water in the 'Fount Santa', the holy fountain, as well as through a forty-day retreat to be concluded with 'the death as to matter, in the tomb'. Bethlehem, the mystical gate came into view... Soon he would be an initiate, a Pure One, a Parfait! What an inspiring prospect!.. ☸

On a journey

Being on vacation means to get some distance from daily life and to see everything from a new point of view and another perspective. When travelling to a distant country we often acquire a broader perspective because we become part of a greater picture.

As a European we might be seen in South Africa as a white, and in Bali as a colonialist. In the US we might be seen as an accomplice and in India as someone who seeks for eternal truth like so many other travellers there. In France or Italy we might stand for the austere part of a continent that seeks for its identity. When travelling, we may experience in a direct and unexpected way how people, or different groups of people, have a connection to each other. But at the same time they are also confined by their race, group or country. Everyone's history and faith are determined by it. Sometimes in a positive way and often also in an ill-fated way. When we travel we often witness how women and men work very hard and over exert themselves for a little bit of luck in their lives or for a better future for their children or their country.



with the Apostle Paul



Image: Brahma Vihara is the only Buddhist temple on the island of Bali. It is also called the small Borobudur.

Close observation lets us realize that the difference between them and us consists of outer circumstances and temporary conditions only.

During our travels comes a moment when we begin to perceive ourselves as a Cosmopolitan, as a citizen of the Universe. We realize that we are all in the same boat and that we all share a very long path throughout history

It took millions of years until mankind in its entirety - Homo sapiens - developed into a rationally thinking human being. Only in the last ten thousand years have we shared the ability to think and reason.

On our unimaginably long path throughout history we were never left alone. Even when throughout difficult times it was not that obvious we were always guided by mighty hierarchies that directed the cosmic processes and phases of the development of consciousness. Messengers of the light came repeatedly to bring us hope and offer us an infinite outlook on other fields of life that await us.

Great Ones in Spirit and wisdom illuminated our paths. During the epochs of history we were given glimpses of divine beauty, goodness and truth.

With stories, images, and music these glimpses were etched into human consciousness.

During all times there were human beings who were willing to sacrifice themselves for others. But now in our modern time (which is already hundreds of years old) it looks as if we have entered a period of acceleration that propels us forward to a culmination.

Our culture began more than 10.000 years ago. Its evolution took a long time and consisted of a slow self-development. Our self-responsibility kept increasing since the time of the old

We have to take on full self-responsibility. In this process we will eventually find our own, innermost and everlasting essence

.....

Greeks. More and more of our fate was put in our own hands. And now in our current time, when the Great Ones that guided mankind in the past have stepped into the background, we have to take on responsibility for our lives ourselves.

We cannot leave it anymore to our parents or our leaders. We cannot blame our circumstances or God. It is solely up to us. We have to grow up and take on full self-responsibility. In this process we will eventually find our own, innermost and everlasting essence.

What Bali can teach us

When vacationing in Bali we can very clearly experience the differences in development of consciousness. The Balinese are proud of their mix of ancestral worship and traditional Hinduism. Their entire life is dominated by religion.

Every day women are busy for hours with the preparation of exquisitely woven and colourfully decorated offerings for sacrifice. Several times during the day men and women conduct ceremonies to honour their ancestors or to gain favours from their many gods or to pray to Brahma. Every free day is used for ceremonies.

How to think and live is determined by

Sculpture in the temple complex Brahma Vihare. Bramavihara relates to the four states of a Spirit that has found the peace of the Universe: Love, Compassion, Equanimity and Joy over the happiness of others.

family and the village, by century-old traditions and rituals. Individuality and independence seem to be of less importance for the Balinese. This will probably change in the near future. The growing number of Muslims will most likely overpower the Balinese tradition with their more practical life style as well as their orientation towards society and politics.

The inhabitants of Bali are faced with the challenge of the disappearance of their old traditions and of having to adapt their traditional life style. It is tragic and the process will bring a lot of sorrow and confusion. But at the same time it is a necessary phase in the unstoppable development in the growing-up of mankind.

On the one hand we feel very distant to everything we see on Bali. On the other hand we intuitively recognize the situation. We realize that these developments are nothing new. They are actually only the appearance of one rotation of a spiral movement that is repeated over and over again.

The time span of a hundred years or so is then not even important anymore. In this moment we are all brought to the basis of our existence. The trends of polarization, which we all can see and feel everywhere, drive people and groups of people apart; though eventually we will be able to find each other again on another level.

In our own life we can see similar processes. As individualized, western human beings we struggle with primal fears, with our powerlessness and vulnerability in the world and its forces. We are confronted with archetypal themes and fundamental questions that bring up archetypal emotions; e.g. child-like fears, suppression, feelings to be cast out, a strong sense of loss and loneli-



ness. These are sub-conscious shadows of repetitions of the one fundamental experience: the expulsion from paradise. This experience is always present as a wound that does not heal and felt like a great deprivation. No human being can escape it.

Again and again we try to numb this pain with the three classical deceptions: Fame, Power and Wealth. 'Classic' because already the Bible with its deep wisdom, points out these deceptions. If we follow the path of these classical deceptions, we will – individually and collectively – get even deeper entangled in helplessness and lose more and more of our inner direction.

We are not alone

Through our connection to the Golden Rosycross we know from within that the fundamental inner conflict can only be solved by reconnecting the heart with the Spirit of Love and Freedom. This spirit belongs to the microcosmic Heart. Only in this way can the deep wound in our being be healed. And only in this can we truly 'grow up'.

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways. Now we see only an indistinct image in a mirror, but then we will be face to face. Now what I know is incomplete, but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." (1Corinthian 13.11)

In our time many things are in question, unreliable and changing and many people seek desperately for a new basis for their lives. When we arrive at the nadir of our life we discover that we are not alone. Human beings around us have the same experience. This is the one thread that connects us and leads us on a way out. Like a tender touch, a quiet whisper

or an 'answer-that-explains-everything' resounds the call: 'Come. Follow me.' The excerpt above shows us how strongly even today the Apostle Paul resonates with our imagination. This is for a reason. He was fulfilled by the fiery Spirit of Truth and Love. He lived on the basis of the Gnosis in the same way as we try to do so today. Paul had accomplished the astounding and magnificent stage of being truly 'grown-up' spiritually. Therefore he was autonomous in his thinking and his actions. He was tireless in his striving to remove everything that did not belong to the essence. Paul was courageous in renewing everything. But he was not vain. He was always aware of his limitations as a nature-born human being. These are characteristics of a real grown-up. What made him a truly noble grown-up is that he was not only independently thinking and living from an inner knowledge, but he was as well deeply connected to the human beings around him. (He surely couldn't act any differently.) He was connected to everyone else without overpowering them. He trusted their soul power and focused only on what was possible or could become possible.

In this way, we could have a similar relation to other people, and probably, sometimes it is like that already. Not only in an abstract and theoretical way and not only with those who consciously seek and find the Spiritual School, but also with those human beings that cross our paths and have a different world view.

We are good helpers when we – like Paul – are guided by the Spirit and have an inner independence; when we are undivided within ourselves and our head and heart are one; – when we know from deep within our heart, but at the same time also understand with our

head. When we can live out of such compassionate and healing understanding. To know and live this quenches our inner thirst guides us to so much more.

We are a good helper when we have an open heart and connect with every human being on the basis of this liberated and enlightened soul state. Then we will truly understand our fellow human beings, be of support to them within the framework of their possibilities. These moments require from us to be truly present in the here and now, so we can see before anything else the value of the other person as a fellow human being. And that is love. ★



Wisdom cannot be found within philosophical books or in eloquence, but rather by turning away from these influences of the senses and turning to the most simple and infinite things. Learn how to receive these in a temple which is free from all vice. Immerse yourself in fiery love, so that you can see and taste how sweet is “that which is sweeter than all sweetness”. Once you have tasted this, everything you find important in this moment will seem

ridiculous. You will become so humble that not an ounce of arrogance, or of other vices, will remain within you. Once you have tasted this wisdom you will, with a chaste and pure heart, become inseparably attached to it. You would then rather prefer to forsake this world and all of the other things that don’t correspond to this wisdom. Instead you will live with ineffable happiness, knowing that you will depart this earth. *Nicolas de Cusa*

The respiration field





Inspiration: all human life on earth begins with a deep breath, often followed by a loud scream. The so-called independent life of each of us depends entirely on breathing. As the earth is surrounded by an atmosphere, so in a similar way, we live inside our own little sphere, our breathing field. This microcosmic respiration field is a life sphere, a very personal astral sphere, structurally and functionally exactly the same as the large respiration field of the cosmos.

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Adem Breathing propels everything into life, into an on-going conversion to progressive change. That mysterious life force was recognized throughout all times and was named *prana* by the Indians, *pneuma* by the Greeks - the Chinese called it *chi* and the Romans *spiritus vitalis*, as it is the life-giving essence for all levels on which life expresses itself.

The breath regulates the construction of matter and also its destruction. And it regulates the breakthrough to a completely new, higher level of life. Or, as poetically described by a botanist inspired by Taoism: "The whole scenery outside is symbolic of the landscape inside a person. Everything is included in one and the same natural, cosmic process. At the same time this is a spiritual process, from high to low inspired by *chi*, in which the entire cosmos shares, and man occupies a modest place – although he may also share in it with heart and soul so that all separation disappears. Just as deep in the countryside hidden caves open up to the great space, he continues, thus liberation and immortality are hidden in the inner world of man.

Installation of Jim Lambie in the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh 2014.
Photo Ruth Clark, Courtesy of The Fruitmarket Gallery

It is always that apparent contradiction which carries the miracle of the One in itself, the miracle of the perfect possibility for liberation, the miracle of a path that always continues, a life sphere which is infinite. In “The Nuctemeron”

J. van Rijckenborgh states however:

“There is no dialectical human being and no divine man who can resist the guidance of the magnetic forces in his respiration field.”

A very powerful statement that drives us to re-consider the situation in which we find ourselves seen from the perspective of our respiration field.

Every human being when coming to this earth is born into a breath field - a field, a sphere in which the legacy of many previous lives was left behind. That may be a beautiful treasury - or a dank prison - or anything conceivable in between – with which we start our life.

Atmosphere is all-decisive. In a good atmosphere mischief can be changed for the better. A sphere or a field is determined by the forces that are concentrated therein. The classical Rosicrucians knew they were protected by a fiery force concentration in their respiration field. They placed their work full-knowingly under the protection of that power: “under the shadow of Thy wings.”

Every person must breathe. We can hold our breath for just for a short time or we can breathe fast in a forced way. If we were to continue with either of these we will lose our consciousness, after which our automatic respiration system will take over again in the same way that breathing continues as it does in our sleep or in a coma.

In a corresponding manner, it is also not possible to influence the magnetic or astral breathing with our will. A man who had tried to rid himself of a deep rooted tendency with his will once said “All that I could do with my will, was to decide to look at it – in order to perceive it as objectively as possible.

Karl von Eckartshausen saw this ‘objectively perceiving’ as a first step towards an “inner perception”. It is an inwardly stepping back, maintaining a certain distance, though with full attention. Full attention and stepping back: this may seem contradictory. However, it is the attitude of someone who has come to a boundary and yet knows from within that there is a path that goes further. Because of this attitude a certain degree of calmness comes into the respiration field, which enables us to assimilate other magnetic forces.

He or she who, maintaining that calmness, enters one of the temples of the Spiritual School, knows that for him or for her, for a moment the opportunity is given to assimilate nutrition from God’s breath. It is the holy Light sustenance which illuminates

the space created in his breath field, which corrodes the threads of fate, which creates harmony in chaos and strengthens peace in the person.

The breath of God is not just a radiation. It is also a substance flowing through the universe, which permeates everything; it is a radiation which will be able to change humankind entirely. The undeniable consequence thereof will also be that a person's magnetic breathing will change. His respiration field becomes more quiet and his consciousness clearer. With all the work being undertaken in that consciousness, such a person frees himself more and more from his astral ballast.

Thus there is an increasing space for the soul. The soul increases in brightness, and slowly but surely the atmosphere in the respiration field changes.

Karl von Eckartshausen calls this the result of the confluence of observant life with practical life. The School teaches: unyielding belief, intense yearning and constantly pursued striving, or symbolically: 'standing on the carpet'. These are the conditions which eventually change the magnetic breathing and open up the respiration field for forces from the pure astral atmosphere.

Initially, we live in a closed atmosphere, in which a seemingly meaningless sequence of construction and demolition takes place, and where there seems to be no room for escape. By means of an observant attitude of life, through continuous openness to the more profound, renewal and exaltation, and from there to undertake what contributes to happiness and preservation of the world and humanity, an increasingly rarefied subtle atmosphere will - from the limitless atmosphere of the Great Breath - descend into our breath field.

Then the situation will arise that J. van Rijckenborgh describes in the *Nuctemeron*: "The magic fire of the universe, wherein is all life, now no longer has to penetrate through the tangled threads of the web of destiny in the respiration field. The original fire can enter directly into the microcosmic system and it will be concentrated in the respiration field, from which the candidate will feed his being with this hermetic fire. "It is an extraordinarily gracious situation described here, which everyone will be able to recognize and look forward to. Thus man is given a glimpse into a high reality which guides him along the shortest possible path - the path of serving mankind. This path equips and protects him completely, because it is no longer his will that drives him, but the soul that lives with the Spirit.

If the Soul is like this - not because we contemplate it, not because we want it, but because the time for our longed-for efforts has arrived - then the breath field becomes a hallowed field. Then it is inevitable that all our thoughts, feelings and actions will be dedicated to the spiritual happiness and preservation of the world and humanity. ★

The way to where

On the modest parking lot where our small group stood waiting for our departure, little could be seen of the surroundings. We had been told all sorts of things of what was waiting for us, but not the whereabouts of where we had to go. I sneaked a look around me. The others seemed so sure of themselves! They had backpacks, mountaineering boots and ingenious water bottles. I think they all had taken survival courses or something like that, for they all knew the technical terminology. They talked with the leaders as if they had already made a lot of this kind of trips. For me everything was new. I had only been listening, open mouthed as it were. It all sounded as if I had been waiting my entire life for this. I was filled with questions, but I didn't pose any. Yet they were answered, but not with directions. When I was asked if I wanted to go on a journey, I was surprised that I was accepted and at the same time I knew that nothing could have stopped me. All disadvantages, for clearly they were there, were clearly taken care of, too.

There was just no stopping it. I had for some time had a feeling of intense expectation, not knowing what I actually expected. I received a smile from an old man, with no apparent reason, and this made me feel that I was on the right track. Incomprehensible maybe, but undeniable. Then I met this tour group. A remarkable collection of people and each one so different... And though I was already middle aged, here I was a greenhorn. Oddly enough the confident ones were also

much more casual. They skipped the introductory evening because of a game that they wanted to play. But no matter, they already knew so much about it. Hey, what's happening now? Are the ones with the backpacks leaving us now or did it just look like that? Yes, that's how it was. They turned back, but backing out could never be the way, because there was no going back.

The leaders came over to wish us a good trip. We all shook hands and then I was on my own. You might say that that was impossible, in the middle of a small group, and yet that is how it was. I only carried a compass, but didn't know how it worked. Because I didn't know where I was supposed to go to, I just started to walk. Which suited me well enough. The surroundings were magnificent and at regular intervals I met a fellow traveller, sometimes one whom I knew and sometimes one who had been on the path longer than I. All of us relied upon our own compass but these were probably all of a different make because there were no travellers that walked beside or behind me. Funnily though, it felt as if there were, but when I looked around I saw nobody.

I was so glad that I was on my way that I almost began to hop. Even though we had been warned, I didn't notice any nasty obstacles. Sometimes I saw someone standing still, with a worried face, and I also met somebody who had lain himself down on the ground. I wanted to help him up, but that didn't work so well so he said that he would manage by himself.

Of course it rained sometimes and it was often cold or hot, but generally speaking

The only thing that really draws my attention in these surroundings is a large species of bird that sits on top of the boulder



Light Visions

my journey went pretty smoothly. Then suddenly I came to a border. Not that I saw one, but I noticed it when I crossed it. Now everything was new and unknown to me. I therefore walked more carefully, at times doubting if I should go left or right. There came crevices in the rocks that I had to jump over, sometimes not without danger. There were parts that were very high that left me all done in, followed by scary steeply winding paths going downwards that were slippery from the rain. Yet I never wished that I had stayed home, because home, that was here, at each moment.

Presently I stand before this enormous boulder, for weeks or months, I am not exactly sure. I have already tried all kinds of things. I have pushed, pulled, shoved, hacked, carved, assailed, scaled it and slid down the boulder again. No human being in sight and I cannot go one step further. I have gathered all my strength but it does not want to yield. I even cannot see what is behind beside it. Going back is impossible - I don't even need to try it. But yet I cannot remain here forever, do I? I am hungry and thirsty and that is why I would try anything, if I would just get rid of that boulder. But the more I try, the more tired I become and I definitely do not want to sleep. I have been assured that one must never fall asleep, for it is then very difficult to awaken. I sit down on a spur of the boulder and reflect on all the methods I have already used. And yet, there must be a way... Every now and then it seems as if just out of reach something useful pops into my head, but if I try to catch it, it is gone again. The only thing that really draws my attention in

these surroundings is a large species of bird that sits on top of the boulder. It has been there for quite a while now. It is a strange animal that looks askance at me. I am so lonely now that I have the tendency to have a chat with it, but that is crazy of course. Every now and then it flies upwards for a bit and then returns to the same spot. It would be nice if I could fly myself, I think. Then I would be able to fly over this thing. Could that bird be living behind that boulder?

Look, it flies up again, higher than before and I follow it with my eyes. Higher and higher it goes and it is wonderful to see how its slender wings contrast against the blue sky. A circle of light surrounds it and I realize that it flies exactly between the sun and me, straight towards the light.

I forget the boulder and let my heart fly with it, so lovely, light and free. No part of my trip can surpass this high flight and it looks as if the bird wears a crown of intense white light with jewels in all colours. It is crazy, but I feel myself coming closer and closer to it and pretty quickly I reach its back where I find a soft seat. We soar together brilliantly through the sky but suddenly my thoughts are with the journey. Should it go upwards?

The bird turns its head and I look into the eyes of an old acquaintance, but who? His voice is low and high and soft and clear at the same time: 'First up and then down again, and then to work!'

And in high spirits we descend again to the point where I stood before. The boulder is still there but it is now transparent. I take a step and without any effort I walk through it. ★



At the moment I still see eternal life as if in a mirror, in an image, as a mystery, for it is nothing but the blessed gaze with which You never cease to divine me so lovingly, indeed, even into the secret places of my heart. Thus to be seen by You in this way is life-giving. You continually and ceaselessly extend to me the sweetest love. You mean to enkindle love in me by giving of Your love and by feeding

me, stirring my highest longing. By stirring this yearning, You let me drink of joy and immerse me in a source of life, by which it will continue and expand. The purpose is to let me share in Your immortality... because that is the absolute ultimate of every reasonable demand and a greater one can not exist.
Nicolas de Cusa



Albert Bierstadt, Looking down Yosemite Valley, California 1865



Beauty and the sublime

The sublime (from the Latin *sublimis*) relates to the quality of greatness, whether it is physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, esthetical, spiritual or artistic. The term refers in particular to a greatness that falls outside all possible computation, measurement or imitation.

(Wikipedia)

Antiquity attributed a spiritual value to the power of beauty that could elevate the soul. In the course of the centuries we see a fluctuation of appreciation in this respect, not in the least because mankind came to realize that in order to experience beauty we need our senses, but the reliability of the senses with regard to a spiritual value is relative.

Nevertheless, the appreciation of e.g. Venus as a representative of beauty can be called a constant in all times, possibly with a small dip in the twentieth century. Lady Venus as a symbol of beauty is universal, although the nature of beauty in itself cannot be comprehended nor possessed at any length of time. An Italian poet of the sixteenth century called the true enchantment of the beauty of Venus: 'non so che', that is: 'I can't really fathom it.'

The appreciation of the Sublime comes later. The concept was given meaning much later in history. In alchemy, Jan van Ruusbroec, possibly for the first time, describes the great heat that is associated with the inner work of a spiritual wedding and he calls this (spiritual) work 'Sublime'. In the spiritual-chemical tradition, the stage of the Sublimatio is an important phase in the spiritual process of transmutation. And the 'immortalization' of the soul found its inspiration in the enchantment of beauty through the radiation of Venus that was called 'divine'.

In the Romanticism era, the relation between sensory perception to see the Sublime and the experiencing of the Beauty appears to be a struggle. Only in transfiguration this struggle comes to an end when we are able to complete the alchemical process by the 'Dionysian fire' and end it in a sublime alchemical wedding.

In a prayer of the Mandeans – a Johannean religious community for which purity and the working of the light stood central – there is a passage in which the one sending up the prayer asks God if his eyes might only perceive the beauty of the world and the reality, and not its ugliness. It is not so much an appeal to learn to see beauty but rather to adjust one's sight in such a way that only beauty will be perceived and transmitted to the consciousness. As if the supplicant would want to change the 'sensory' code in such a way that only the values of purity and the workings of the light would be reflected in what is observed. Of course, that would be marvellous if it could be brought about and maybe a part of the great law of love is indeed about seeing the beauty of creation and encountering this wondrous nature without fight and strife and to cover its ugliness with the mantle of love at the same time.

But could we permit ourselves to ignore that part of reality? That is to say: is the process of learning to appreciate both beauty and ugliness, not part of 'following the path'? Is it not important to be sober and to see beauty against the existence of ugliness? J. van Rijckenborgh and Catharine de Petri present in *The Chinese Gnosis*, the staggering insight that ugliness is the proof that beauty exists – the one proves the other. They write: 'The human being is poor of beauty, of real Beauty, and therefore he loves delusion. And because he is so unhappy, he lies away the ugliness. But that is not possible, since he who builds his life on appearances, on the unreal, raises at the same time very strong opposing reactions. If you come to the discovery that the situation is not in order – a situation that initially you have called beautiful, resoundingly and with full con-

The appearance of beauty and the appearance of good both bring forth the ugliness

viction - then at first you will not accept that discovery. But as you proceed, the reality of ugliness overpowers you. That means the immersion in and the degeneration by appearances. The appearance of beauty and the appearance of good both bring forth the opposite: ugliness'. Can we conclude from this that we can experience true beauty only in the sublime?

There are people who say that they have experienced the sublime, that they have had an experience that they could but call sublime. A peak experience, a moment of illumination, a moment of being lifted above oneself that coincided with the serenity of united experience* and moreover comprises, at the same time, the experience of perfect relationships in sound, colour, form and content. Senses and consciousness, separately and in connection, may experience the sublime. The harmony of relationships can be sublime and deep and moving – and bring to mind the notion of the good, the beauty and truth of Greek philosophy. There is no separate Greek word for 'the sublime'. Nevertheless the 'sublime' has an expression in our language. Etymologically it knows an origin in Latin via Old-French and Middle English and originated somewhere between 1200 and 1500. Latin gives a cryptic description as the origin of 'Sub-limen', like 'hanging under the doorjamb' and later 'hanging high in the air or uplifting'

Although there is no Greek equivalent for the word 'sublime', 'the beauty, the good and the true' on which Plato wrote comes close to the concept of the 'sublime'. For the Greeks, 'beauty' had an 'absolute value' and certainly approaches our present day concept.

The sublime as an experience, however, seems to be of later times, although the myth of the cave of Plato certainly alludes to such an experience.

The further development of the word shows a degeneration of meaning, until it is almost meaningless, as if the 'sublime' has diminished its own power and has come under the same category as 'cool', 'mega' and 'super'.

When we look at the degeneration of the intrinsic meaning of words 'Ultimate' and 'Sublime' there is not much difference. The writer Hans Hertog de Jager explains in his book *The Sublime* that the word 'is so contaminated with the feelings of exaggeration and a lack of a sense of reality that we can only be used without irony by commentators of football matches and adolescents with a TV-vocabulary: 'Sublime, man!' According to this writer sublime has become a word 'that expresses a spiritual impotence and a lack of subtlety'.

Experiencing the Sublime

We see already some experience for the soul and that continues in the meaning of 'uplifted', 'striving for the highest' and even in a negative sense as 'ambitious'.** In the mystic works of Meister Eckehart, in the philosophy of Ficino and Cusanus, we find this 'striving for the highest' in particular as a striving for the classical ideal of beauty and the experience of unity; often going back as far as Plotinus and the Neoplatonic philosophers – where a connection was made with the One. With the mystic Jan van Ruusbroec the

word 'sublime' is strangely enough used for the uplifting of the consciousness. He sees it as a state of enlightenment that one can experience; an intense and powerful inner fire with an immense heat (The sublimity of the alchemical wedding). And with that, the wedding already touches somewhat on the alchemical inner processes.

The nous

We encounter this elevation of the spirit, known as an experience by the soul that sees itself changing, in several situations that always lead us back to Hermes Trismegistus. For the experience of the sublime, he states, the slumber of all the physical senses is a prerequisite. 'Hermes: Once, while I was meditating on the essential things and my mind elevated itself, my bodily senses fell into a slumber as may happen to someone who, after excessive feeding or a result of great bodily fatigue, is overcome by a deep sleep'. Notice that this is not a justification of the sensuality but a comparison so that the profane awareness can open itself for the sublime.

This coupling of the nous that is uplifted after the slumber of the senses, we might find strange now, because you might wonder how beauty as an absolute value in art and science can be experienced without the senses. Is that not an indication that beauty as a component of the sublime as absolute value cannot exist in art and science – and that ugliness is indeed proof of the appearance of beauty? Yet a later philosopher, Spinoza, presented again a similar process: he let go of any desire and every thought of riches, honour and pleasure – so that his nous could ascend. And he also – just like Hermes – has this experience in his nous. Spinoza's sublimity is the high Reason and is equal to the 'the True' of Plato.

Experiencing the sublime with the senses?

But in the course of time – from around 1750 – people were no longer resigned to the impossibility of experiencing the sublime by the senses. Enlightenment and Romanticism explored whether it was yet possible to experience perfect beauty via the senses that gave the observer the experience of the abstract ‘beauty’ of Plato. In Romanticism we see a resurrection of what one thought was the Greek awareness of beauty, the old classical values that were researched in the Renaissance in a rational way, but already at that time it resonated

in the bodily senses. Beauty is complete harmony, initially within the measurement of numbers, form, colour and architecture. An artist is the great creator of order, according to the universal standards but also to his own experience. Chaos becomes the cosmos in the sublime experience of beauty. According to the Greeks, beauty is ‘divine order’ (Pythagoras) and later by Plotinus beauty is divine brilliance. And that ‘divine’ of the Greeks can be translated as ‘sublime’.

Then it can appear that beauty has also become something untouchable and dazzling; as if the perfect harmony provides a

Left: Temple of Unity, Agrigento, Sicily, ca. 440-430 BC
Right: James Turrell makes colour installations, ‘multiplying’ the observation, as in this installation at the Guggenheim, 2013



static beauty. In the same way the projection of heaven as a perfect living and dwelling place repels many people by its alleged dullness. It no longer inspires, motivates, moves us and cannot set emotions into motion anymore, making it seem that 'life' has left it.

Romanticism

That was why in the Romanticism period, after the mental perception of perfection of numbers and measurements during the Renaissance and Baroque, there came a search for the beauty in nature. One wanted to be moved in the wild and unspoilt

elements of nature, up to and including the ultimate undergoing of the sensation of danger (for example by the painter William Turner), in order to experience the ultimate pure rawness of nature. That was also the consequence of the distinction that was made between the beauty and the sublime in the eighteenth century, because in nature beauty is experienced through feelings of harmony, serenity and calmness, but therein are also great chaotic and overwhelming experiences which may lead to bewilderment, confusion and fear. And in this overwhelming experience also lies the chance for the manifestation of the

Chaos becomes the cosmos in the sublime experience of beauty

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The (alchemical) wedding of Hermes and Herse from a picture by Giovanni Jacopo Garaglio, from the weaving factory of the Fleming Willem de Pannemaker, ca. 1570

sublime. Friedrich Schiller in his 'On the Sublime' (1801) describes the sense of the sublime as a mix of feelings. It is a combination of hurt, which is manifested in its highest degree as thrill as well as joy that can grow into an ecstasy. Jacob Boehme describes this 'hurting' as a knightly struggle that we should allow into our being. The ecstasy is not a 'trance of the senses', but it plays a role in the phase of the overwhelming of the senses. However, it is not

lust; for refined souls this feeling is much to be preferred above lust. That is also what Hermes and Spinoza seem to indicate.

The overwhelming untamed nature – a sublime experience

Acts of nature strike us as sublime if they escape our will and therefore cannot be tamed. It is here that we see raw nature; the storms whipped up, oceans, hurricanes and volcanoes, the high mountains,

abysses and wild streams of Turner. That nature can be an overwhelming perception for the senses, whereby a dimension is unveiled where man and nature permeate each other and are in a state of self-forgetfulness. In that self-forgetfulness. Thus a strong feeling of oneness with nature can be experienced.

‘By this experience of oneness nature can again become the reality in which we feel rooted and out of which we may live’.***

But not until we have become aware that the combination of two opposite feelings have become irrefutably one feeling, exposing our moral independence.

Thus we experience, in the feeling of the sublime, that our mood does not necessarily aim at a ‘meaningfulness’, that the laws of nature are not necessarily also our laws and that we have in ourselves an autonomous principle that is independent of all moral emotions.

Alchemy

Maybe this all becomes clear if we compare the aforementioned points with several alchemic phases. Therein we can recognize the phase of Solutio and Coagulatio, and also Conjunctio.

Solutio – self-surrender, as solution, when becoming conscious of being a drop in the ocean.

Coagulatio – connecting the spiritual with the drop in the ocean, by an inner process.

Conjunctio – the coinciding and melting together of paradoxical parts in the independent one Spirit.

Romanticism and the Sublime in other expressions of art

Beethoven, Chopin, Mahler, Debussy, Arvo Pärt (but also others) were composers that could voice in their romantic music the wild nature, tranquillity and the solution. Mozart, in his Magic Flute, put the Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosy-

cross into music. But actually, all forms of art in the Romanticism try to convey the sublime. There are even thinkers who conclude that the best literary fiction – important works in world literature – were written in the nineteenth century.

How do you order chaos?

The romantic process of meeting the Sublime in the overwhelming experience is yet different on many points to the task that the Greeks posed for themselves to bring order in the chaos of the cosmos.

In Chronos, that is: Time devouring all his children, Plato searches for a solution by the distinction between the world as it is and how it could be when it coincides with the world of ideas; wherein Beauty, the True and the Good are manifest. In the sublunary world we, human beings, can only understand the world because we have a recollection of the world of ideas. Therefore it is important to realize how we can proceed and what ‘we’ do with the historical data that are presented us so that we can come to a new solution. Can we reach beyond Chronos by ordering chaos in an inspired way, on the basis of Uranus, the planet of intuition and genius, ruler of Aquarius?

After Romanticism, can we approach the sublime in a new life reality supported by the influences of the planets Uranus and Neptune, wherein we use new sublime achievements, as accents of a truly new era? In the twenty-first century, can the sublime be the result of actual, spiritual alchemy which anticipates a sublime golden age?

Dionysus and Apollo

Yes, said Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, it is possible by transfiguration; from the insight that the field of spiritual life is controlled by Dionysian and Apollonian forces. Because Dionysus is the

All forms
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alchemical fire-principle that burns away the impurity with his untamed fiery forces out of the hidden sublime that can become a transfiguration of Apollo or the divine. Therefore, this process does not come about by beholding static and 'ultimate supreme' beauty and striving for perfect harmony, but it is a process of conversion, which ultimately turns out to be nothing more than just a process, an awareness process. And Nietzsche, who himself stood still in the middle of Romanticism, indicated that that inner process is linked to action, powerful activity. We can execute that transfiguration only within ourselves and we should not project it onto others or onto the outside world. In alchemy this corresponds with the phase of Coagulatio, the self-activity and the Sublimatio that is the art of liberating the hidden spirit from its limitations (Cronos and Saturnus) and all that clings to lower life.

In order that this Coagulatio, which is also called the Laborare (the working, the action and self-activity) is not directed to others and the outside world Nietzsche commanded: 'Thou shalt make war in thyself!' In this way he preserved and directed that energy to the inner process of transfiguration.

That may be the active form of 'Know thyself' of the Greeks. Maybe these two commandments are not mutually exclusive but rather are they paradoxical and complementary, that is making it completely whole and healing.

Mondriaan, the Style and the sublime
Yet we see in the turbulent period at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a revival of the harmony-model in a new guise: the coat of the painter Mondrian of the Style, the art movement of Theo van Doesburg. They went in search of the harmony and the patterns of nature again. One could herein

see a processing of, or a reaction to the Baroque, the strict application of the laws of measures and numbers, the ordering of Saturn. Namely, a rational and rigorous quantitative approach to nature aborted the opportunity to recognize and experience the sublime in nature, and hence the recognition of pattern disappears from life. The quest for simplicity and a basis in that nature in a cultural element such as painting gave deepening to the experience and led some to the thrill of the sublime. That was true not only for the paintings of Mondrian, but can also be seen in works of Rothko, Newton and James Turrell. Often monochromatic, abstract and yet infinitely inward-pulling and revealing that beauty can be experienced in a seemingly simple abstraction that moves. Because in a mysterious way one experiences in that simplicity the unity of the opposites. So you would still - very cleverly! - experience the sublime through the senses.

Rejection of beauty

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, a completely different notion became central to painting and the visual arts: the realization that beauty and the perception of beauty would on the contrary be the great obstacles for the sublime. In Edmund Burke's book *On the Sublime* that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, this English writer gives a purely aesthetic explanation of beauty and the sublime. He does this in terms of the process of perception and the effect it has on the perceiver: beauty presupposes harmony and balance. The sublime is the consequence of a certain painful or wry emotion, caused by the work of art. It was Turner who first expressed this point of view in his paintings. The line of separation between beauty and the sublime was further drawn during the First World War by Marcel Duchamp, who more or

less declared war to beauty and harmony. And this also happened in music. After Debussy the composers turned away from the tonal harmony that was considered universal until then. A new music was invented, composed to consistently reduce the consonants used in the earlier harmonious, resounding music. This was the atonal music, a form of music without a fixed tonal centre. Representatives like Schönberg, Stockhausen, Hindemith tried to break through every soul-touching and emotive experience.

It started from the idea that a complete disregard for aesthetics was needed, because beauty and the perception of beauty could block the sublime – and thus the realization that there was only a keeping up of appearances and that ugliness was the evidence of the appearance of beauty. By rejecting and undermining beauty you at least do not fall into the trap of suggesting the sublime, the absolute, the true that could emanate from beauty.

After all, if something is connected to beauty then it is subject to decay, so it can never be a feature of the absolute good and true. Beauty is and was suspicious, seductive and treacherous.

Beautiful ugliness

With this reasoning, a plea was made for the appreciation of ugliness up to and including the awareness that something can be beautiful in its ugliness - the valuation of decay and disintegration, the appreciation of ruins; the raw, the unfinished, the unpolished, the unsophisticated.

In architecture the architect Ashok Balotra even performed the experiment of building ‘dwellings of ruins’; by this one again comes close to the Romanticism of Turner. It is a little bit like the recognition of ‘the true’ in the Beast by Belle; persevering through the ugliness and the rough exterior of the beast to find within it a white

stone or seed. Or to feel connected with both, perhaps in the realisation that beauty is the joy and the sorrow of the paradise that is close and unreachable to us.

The universe is insensitive

And then there is a rehabilitation of the appreciation of quiet beauty in the arts. Again a thin thread is woven in the emotional life for the sublime. No more demons, as in Ravel’s Bolero, which peace has a downright witching atmosphere. And not by inspired insistence on disharmony and unrighteousness, wilderness and depravity, as Galina Oustvolskaya composed in her penetrating compositions which are described as ‘scratching in the soul’. Oustvolskaya, a pupil of Shostakovich, seriously suffered from the fact that the universe was indifferent to her complaints and that her ‘primal scream’ of an unjust existence went astray in the dark vastness.

A scream that probably stemmed from her inability to see the beauty of it - something the astronauts were able to reverse after photographing the earth from outer space. They underwent this experience of seeing the earth from afar with an aesthetic and emotional appreciation: ‘She is beautiful’, they said, ‘our earth in the middle of that vast space. It gives a feeling of solidarity and unity’.

The thin line to the sublime in the feeling runs parallel with a careful restoration of the appreciation of beauty. The American painter Robert Motherwell indicates in

The atonal music rejected beauty because it was suspicious, seductive and treacherous

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1946 that ‘the aesthetic takes on the function of a medium’, a means to arrive at the infinite background of feelings, and to condense it to a perceptible object.

Are contradictions necessary for the experience of the Sublime?

The writer Manfred van Doorn indicates that contradictions are necessary for a sublime overwhelming experience: ‘The vastness of the universe - which is immeasurable and awesome - the deep black empty and uninhabitable outer space - which is horrible - against which stands the steel blue planet Earth with its thin atmosphere, brilliantly clear but horribly vulnerable.’ The image that he paints also says that the importance of man in time-space sense, is relative, marginal and unimportant. ‘He is born of stardust and will return to stardust - in an indifferent universe.’ He also agrees with what Oustvolskaya so feared: the indifference of the universe for her primal scream. Van Doorn describes the sublime as an intense form of consciousness resembling happiness that can be experienced simultaneously as contrasts like grief and joy and can, at the same time, be transcended.

The flash of the sublime

The writer defines that moment as a flash of the sublime in which opposites are experienced as a unity:

‘The flash is like an electrical discharge that is released when the positive and negative side make contact and cause a spark. This comparison makes it clear that you need opposites to come to an experience of the sublime. If you remain alone in the plus side or only the minus side, no spark is struck’.

The known contradictions that underlie the sublime experience are beauty and ugliness, joy and anxiety, finitude and infinity. Van Doorn also considers the opposites: space-time, full-empty, chaos-order, mat-



The ruin houses of Ashok
Balotra appreciate the raw,
the unfinished, the unpolished
and the unsophisticated

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ter-mind, subject-object, I-other and cause-effect. But for him it can also be about something beautiful that is so beautiful that it requires all your powers to experience it. And thus beauty still seems to be an important element in the experience of the sublime.

In which light can darkness not live?

There is a danger in assuming that it is necessary that one has to undergo contradictions.

Nowadays modern approaches of interrelationships pose that love needs hate and despair needs hope, as the dynamics of life itself. The most difficult thing to maintain in a relationship is the love that was there at the beginning. Sometimes it needs to be very dark to know that there is light.

Yet Pythagoras testifies already of a Light where no darkness can dwell. No one experiencing love wants to hate nor do they want to experience the

despair that comes from hoping for the pretence of love. What love is then connected to the sublime?

Which glow and heat accompany the sublime? Is that the fiery blaze of ascension? It is said that it is the impersonal and infinite Love which is connected to the elevation of the sublime. Once truly enlightened - once included in the unity of all in a final transformed consciousness, man has no need for friction anymore for his continuity. That is when we are included in the reality of unity, freedom and love, into an inner stream that needs no interruption. The preservation of that sublime, transcendent state of love is not work that depends on any contradictions. Sublime love is the love of the immortal soul. A firebird which is sublime...

Cosmic inner fire

When Jan van Rijckenborgh indicates that the soul experiences an incredibly high heat when it approaches the 'Unground' or the 'bottomless deep', he calls it 'sublime'. The inner fire has then become a cosmic fire, a fire of the unity of micros and cosmos, a mild fire that cannot be extinguished. It is a fire of renewal and of continuity.

The light from that fire does not flicker. This love does not need hate. The flames of hate have no hold on Love because they have distinct levels. Love has another quality. Hate and evil can never be sublime because they do not reach that level. Hate and evil can sit deeply, but they do not take root in the 'bottomless deep.'

Jewel of a spiritual wedding

In the unity of the contradictions, the sublime has formed itself in a curious fire process, which can only adorn the beauty of the two-unity, donated by the power of the One who makes the two into One. This is the way the fire renews itself in

nature (Ignus Naturae Renovator Integere, INRI); the power of Christ reveals within us the dynamic two-unity of a frictionless and enlightened state, a divine dialectic. Jan van Rijckenborgh speaks of a 'jewel of a spiritual wedding' to adorn the beauty of the two-unity.

The sublime, thirteenth aeon

In the alchemical wedding of Christian Rosencreutz, beauty also plays a crucial role. There she is the breath-taking untouchable Lady Venus, the great beauty that CRC sees with his senses, which is not quite in accordance with the rules... Where hatred and evil are awful but actual figures in the world of men (and it is terrible what people do to each other). Consciousness, in the greater reality of the immortal soul, goes through all layers, all 'archons and aeons' to the sublime aeon, the thirteenth, while these forces do not even notice its passing.

The beauty – that is: the immortal soul - escapes those forces and powers because she is of a higher order, namely the order of 'the Venus of the mysteries revealed in it's nakedness, perfect and indescribably beautiful and so unearthly and untouchable that CRC stood transfixed', as is described in the fifth day of the Alchemical Wedding.

The beauty of Venus

How can something that is perfect and indescribably beautiful, unearthly and untouchable, still be a medium for the ultimate sublime in the seventh phase of the alchemy for the unity of the opposites and the conjunction of the transfigured state? Modern man in our cultural stage experiences that it is not possible, so he rejects the beauty, even deliberately avoiding it and aiming at a valuation of the decay; looking for disharmony and diverting beauty from art.

Even if you realize that true beauty is not accessible, you do not need to fight it

Inexplicable beauty and love

In an earlier cultural stage, that rejection did not yet play a role. In 1548, Agnolo Firenzuola, an Italian poet and writer, wrote *Della bellezza della donna*, a dialogue about beauty in women, in which he dedicated the first dozen pages to beauty in all its aspects. Ultimately, the author noted, that which constituted the real enchantment of beauty was nothing like that which he had written about in admiration and wonder. Because, he says, the real charm of the beauty of Venus is nothing like that, but it is a 'non so che', a 'I do not know what'. Also, the French Enlightenment thinker Montesquieu (1753) did not deny the existence of the 'invisible enchantment' that may be specific to women and art. It's like falling in love - we can experience it but cannot know it. By its very nature it is not intellectual, it is incomprehensible and inexplicable. In the twentieth century, the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch argues that beauty does not have to be an object of rejection and an object to rebel against. Even if you realize that true beauty is not accessible, you do not need to fight it or even to dismiss it. If you cannot say that beauty exists, then that does not mean that she does not exist.

We can never truly perceive beauty in its wholeness. We can only meet her in multiple appearances. She shows herself only in things and therefore always in different forms. And that meeting can be valuable and even be a prelude

This realization also lives in the more recent cultural history and design for the

sublime. The French impressionist Paul Cézanne voiced this when he stated that the power that would enable us to rise to the beauty (which is Eros) has disappeared.

Our quest is to retrieve the power that is in the inner nucleus of beauty and to recover it.

Art, all art, can keep trying to display the essence of beauty, either in simplicity, or with more modern resources, or via abstractions and social engagement, but it must ultimately admit that beauty as a medium needs an inner reflection. Lady Venus should be internalized so that the 'overwhelming of the sublime' can take place as an eternal enlightenment. That inner 'acquiring' means nothing more or less than working with the infinite power of love, in the above-described extensive field of heat.

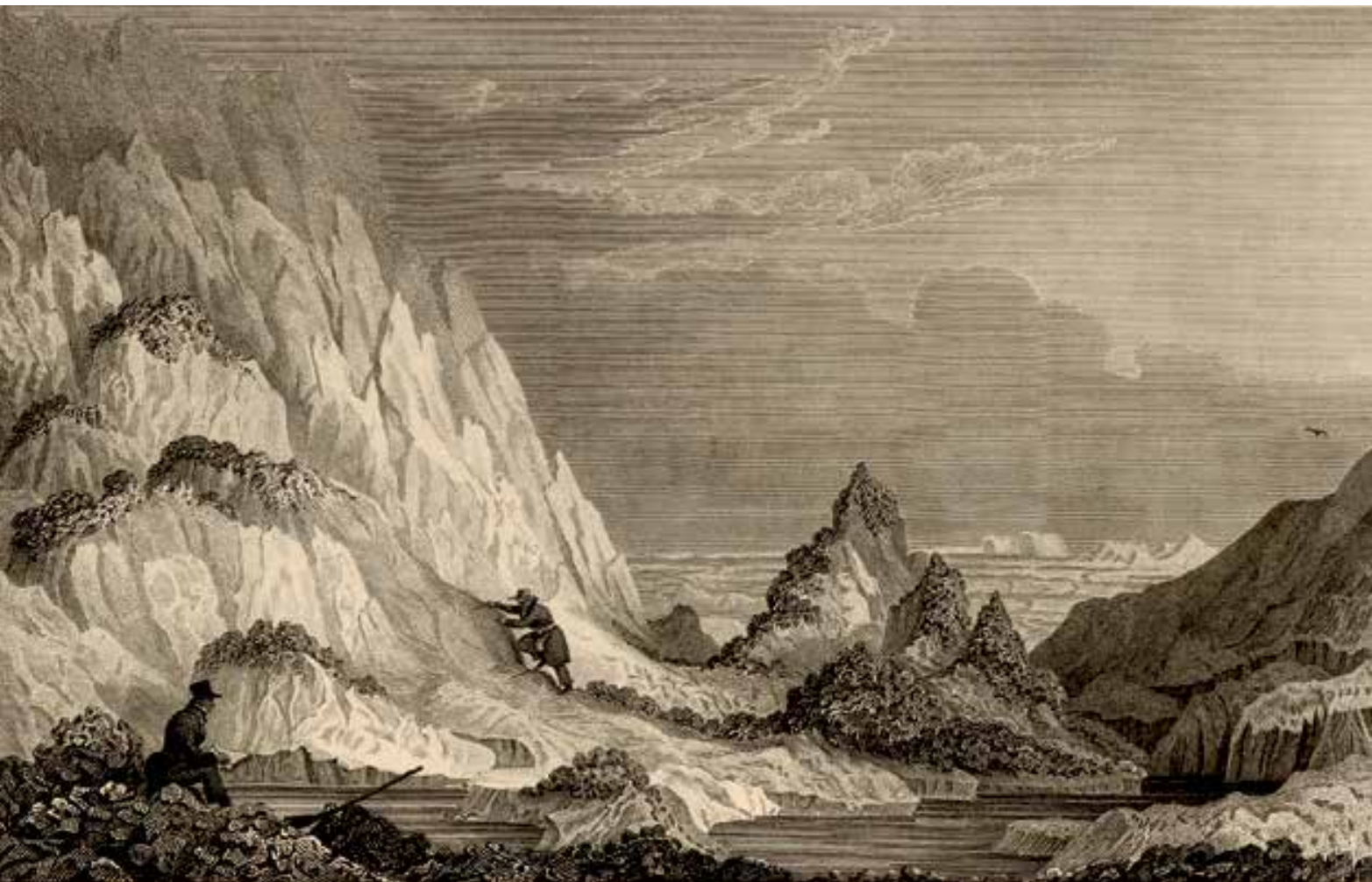
Working with that energy makes 'the tree melt' in the terminology of the Alchemical Wedding. If the fusion, the alchemical change that works as a synthesis, is finished, then 'Lady Venus will awaken and be the mother of a king', as the Alchemical Wedding testifies. Sublime man is awakened - the king-priest.

The prayer: 'to see with the eyes of love' which is inspired by beauty, is finally answered. ☸

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Iceberg stuck to a reef. Illustrated by
Kept. Back during an expedition to
the MacKenzie River 1824-1826



The eye and the witness



Study of Michelangelo

After death, for every human being the personality will be totally dissolved. The exception is stated as: 'he who dies before he dies, will not be decreased when he is deceased.' He will remain fully conscious in a wondrous harmonious process. For him the source of his existence opens up, like a far star, and he will ultimately become at one with it. Jacob Boehme explains that then 'his soul will become an eye that witnesses.

Br Beside our birth in this world, there are two moments which, viewed from a higher cosmic point of view, are significant for a person in the Spiritual School. The first one is his entrance, his first true contact. It is the moment when his heart is touched and is opened for what was hitherto unknown - the Gnosis. This is a law of the Light, and the laws of the Light do not change. It is the moment that a human being knows for sure: yes, this is it; this is what I have so long and longingly looked for.

It means being touched or having been touched and such a person inwardly underwrites the truth of the very simple but very touching poem by Catharose de Petri in her booklet *Seven voices speak*:

*Lost as to the self
in the desert sands,
I feel I have been chosen
in 'non-being' sense.
The light has truly found me
In my weary lot,
calls me from this gloomy place
to the Stream of God.*

When you have truly experienced such a moment, then your existence has been noticed in the cosmic field-of-life! There, a star is alighted and you are, as it were, born again inwardly.

You don't yet know anything of that field, just like a new-born baby doesn't consciously perceive anything of the world around him. But in the planetary field of life a Light has en-flamed. A wave of support and love was liberated from the field that corresponds with our original travel

documents which our microcosm received when it began its Grand Tour. The second moment is your departure from these earthly abodes. It may be that you will then pass over the border and come home again, back in the land of your departure. That would be exceptionally fortunate, and then you are able to continue your activities as a newly transformed personality, powerfully inspired by the impulses of the spirit. It can also be, however that you haven't noticed any border during your recess on earth. Then absolutely nothing changes for you. All circumstances remain the same, all problems remain the same, and all basic principles of earthly life will then remain the same. If there is anything more hopeless from our point of view, it is this situation.

For a while you may miss the people who were here on earth with you. For if one thing is certain, it is sure that people are born, live, die and re-incarnate in groups. After a shorter or longer period we shall accompany each other again.

But in this second case something has actually changed: it is a 'rien ne va plus'. You are not able to act anymore in that realm. You will see everything differently. A process of reflection and experience follows, but you cannot change anything in your life anymore. There is rest - it is sometimes called 'eternal rest' - and it may seem like some summer land repose, but slowly everything will dissolve again. From a doing, active person - do you remember how busy you were? - you become once more a witness. Everything is reeled off before your observation and you experience all the goodness as well as all the misery that you have caused your fellow human beings as if it were done to you. Fair is fair. And the Light says: 'As I taught Noah, so I teach you.' These laws do not change. It can sometimes be useful to put this real state of affairs before you.

Bearing witness

It is a fine expression, 'bearing witness'. It means 'providing proof' and is often used judicially.

The expression 'to wit' also means: specifically - particularly - expressly - in other words, it brings something to the fore - it makes something more clear.

There is also a remarkable parallel. Being a pupil is also a form of witnessing, in the sense of giving evidence of one's inner state. You could say it is the essence of the path. The pupil sees how the Light does its work within him and experiences a need to express his inner knowledge as a living testimony. One can also say that the pupil dies while he lives. The pupil

undergoes a process that is very similar to 'the dissolving of the garments' as it is called, after our physical death. This applies to each one of us, wholly in accordance with the great laws and lines of the planetary life cycle. But with what a difference!

Such a pupil doesn't have to witness how his vehicles dissolve after death. He observes something else: how the elementary processes of the mental, the astral and the ether life act in harmony. The fiery storms of feelings, the life forces that shoot here and there through the aural field and that which pulverizes the inner rest that he longs for, they all dissolve as if proven an illusion. The inner battle between the feelings of guilt, between the see-saw of certainty and uncertainty, all those mental battles we all know so well, all those larger and smaller fires... they are extinguished and the inner self comes to rest. What at first demanded all our life force now becomes balanced. And what is in balance requires the least energy. But he or she does not lose the source of energy that has been allotted him. It has risen like a sun. He experiences 'the approach of the fires of mercy'. A new clarity becomes part of him as well as a growing inner certainty. Such a pupil becomes strong, in balance, ready to support the Work. And amazed he wonders, how it is possible that he is so favoured – that he is allowed to experience this surprising inner lightness - this simplicity and rest.

Fleeing the world

At one time some masters asked Jakob Boehme derisively the question: 'Tell us shoemaker, are you sure we are the chosen of God?'

Boehme replied: 'It is not the habit of the chosen ones to flaunt this. It is rather to reveal oneself in the transience of matter, which is full of labour pains and dan-

Would the soul be able to
know God without the world,
then the world would not
have been created for her

.....

gers. And there is the seal of God that is printed on their forehead, which unseals time. For the chosen one is not made for just the one moment, but for thousands of years, and he is born in the time of the great year to reveal the wonders that God has in mind. The end and the beginning of a new age of humanity have been prepared for a long time, and we are right in the middle of it.'

The serious seeker who pores over the biographies of women and men of God will find many such testimonies. Let us remain yet for one more moment with the shoemaker from Silesia, Germany. For the above-mentioned conversation continued, or rather a tumult arose because of it, and they all spoke together.

They cried that Boehme declared something very different from what was written in the Scriptures. There were those who said that he was dangerous and a heretic. Others accosted him why he did not flee this world and reject it, like the saints of the church history, but that he rather revered it. They accused him: 'Don't we all know that the soul, if it wants to know God, must flee this world?'

But Boehme was combative: 'Would the soul be able to know God without the world, then the world would not have been created for her. One must not flee the world, one must maintain her.'

A young understanding voice then called out:

'How else could a human being be able to radiate in all his delightful characteristics, without the resistance of the world? Honour, love and courage only shine because the world puts itself darkly opposite these.'

Balthasar Walter, known as a doubter and a dissenter, who had restlessly wandered the world in search of Truth, and whose tongue was feared, was also present at this debate. It seemed he had finally found somebody who forcefully and with certainty testified to the Truth. Someone who descended so deeply, that he had stumbled across the foundation of creation. Walter said: 'I have never been so happy in any country or among any scholars as at this moment. Until today I did not realize that inner knowledge makes for such happiness.'

And Boehme, who saw into the depth of the soul of this restless wanderer,



felt a great affection for him, while he said:

'Joy is the greatest divine gift possible to a human being. For as soon as the new being awakens, his countenance is also full of joy. As an outwardly living human being sees the outer world, so the reborn human being sees the inner divine world wherein he lives. Thereafter God's joyful spirit soon leads his soul into His divine school of Wisdom, and there it learns more than in all schools of this world.' This school is not restricted to the Spiritual School, but is at one with it, and it encompasses all true schools. They have one communal focus, which is the nucleus that is Christ.

Our souls are being instructed, and we are the witnesses.

We are reconnected with the Wisdom, and we are the witnesses.

Our souls grow and flourish, and we are the amazed and astonished witnesses.

What else is Christian Rosycross but a witness during the seven days of his journey?

Full of amazement he observes the great process of the Alchemical Wedding, and is exceedingly glad because of it. And then at the end, when he thinks that the following morning he must become a gatekeeper, he finds he has come home.

Forty questions to the soul

The same Balthasar Walter in 1620 posed forty questions to Jacob Boehme, all with regard to the soul. They were however all questions of the mind, like: Where does the soul come from? Wherein does it breathe? How does it come into the body? Which glorified bodies does it know? It made Boehme sigh but he has answered them all anyway, for he who asks makes revelation possible and thus has a right to an answer.

He stated: 'Not that I know more than any other, but in order that we gain insight in our own thoughts, our sincere seeking and the longing of our heart, it has been given to me to answer you.'

One of Balthasar Walter's questions, the fifth one, is: 'What does the soul look like, and what shape is it?'

And Jakob Boehme answers: 'As a twig cut from a tree, grows again in the shape of that tree, and as a child may bear the image of the mother, so the soul has as its first principle the shape of a ball or sphere. Like its origine it has the shape of an eye. And it cannot be otherwise, for there is nothing in it that can make it different. And yet it is also twofold, like a heart wherein a cross is.

Secondly, in the second principle, it is a spirit, a perfect image, like the outer human being.

And thirdly, in the third principle, it is a mirror of the entire world, of everything that exists in heaven and on earth. Every characteristic of each creature lies therein, for the mirror is like the firmament and the stars.

As a crown it is, and in it is the number, or the course of life, of the outer human being; the end of his life, with all the happiness and unhappiness that may befall the outer human being.'

Thus we may indeed state that the soul is an eye that perceives, a spirit which guides, and a mirror of all forces in the world.

The human being stands in this threefold life. Separately each life is a mystery or an Arcanum, says Boehme, a secret for the other two, and it longs for the other two, which is exactly the aim of creation. And the Absolute One, the infinite Creator, the heavenly substance, longs for this mirror, because this world, seen in its multiplicity of three, is an absolute likeness to God's being and substance.

Potentially, no, rather in reality, the Deity is manifested in an earthly likeness, says Boehme. For it is out of the question that the great miracle of the Arcanum, or the hidden secret, can be opened in the world of angels. After all, that angelic world was born entirely within, and out of love. What is within and breathes in the Love, only knows bliss, but not the force of desire, and therefore cannot do otherwise than spread God's love, and in that way it supports the lower realms. But in this earthly world, where love and wrath (or resistance and anger) are mixed, in this world the miracle is possible! Therein a human being can be born twice! Boehme continues:

'And in this world the twofold birth is possible - the miracle can take place. For the whole outer being longs strongly for the inner one. It searches for its primeval image. It longs for freedom, to be liberated from his restrictions, that is: the ignorance of the other two elements.

It is as if Jacob Boehme realises that this is getting too complicated for us. Therefore he concludes by explaining it thus:

'You do understand that all forms in nature long for the Light? Because this longing produces the oil (he means: the substance) wherein the Light can burn and be known, for it stems originally from meekness.'

Thus, first of all we need to know about our own life, which is lived in the middle of the fire, for life burns in fire.

And then, secondly, we need to immerse ourselves in the longing of, and for, the Love that originally arose from the Word and goes up to the highest heaven, the atmosphere of the angels, of the pure souls, where the heart of God goes out to us in great force, in a great longing for us, and thus He pulls us into his mystery.

And thirdly we need to study and fath-

om the 'magical kingdom' of this world, for that also burns within us and submerges us in its Force, into its wonders, for it must reveal itself! For the human being has been created, has been brought forth, so that he may reveal this great threefold mystery, and bring the miracle to the Light, and give it form, according to the eternal wisdom. This is how Jacob Boehme stated it.

Aren't these words wonderfully close to the words of the classical Rosycross order? It is as if we are allowed a different, knowing view into the burial temple where the brothers Rosycross came across the unblemished body of Christian Rosycross, the matrix of the new human being.

Let us, with this treasure in hand, remain very practical. We stand in a torn world, and there is little to be seen around us of a glorious and harmonic world. But this was also the case with Boehme in his age! In his time and surroundings the all-destroying Thirty Year War raged. On top of that all his life he suffered attacks on his work, on his person and on his integrity. Yet he kept on pointing to these revelations, and testified of the profound truths of Life and the Kingdom - of the small as well as the Great world.

We rise above all disharmony, all turmoil of battle, if we understand these three principles:

1. That we only have to observe. That is the meaning of 'witnessing'.
2. That there is a guiding spirit, a principal element that is a thousand fold more secure and loving than our own spirit, and encompasses it entirely.
3. That the mirror can reflect the miracle of creation, because the alchemist - which we are as pupils of the spirit - makes all forces flow together harmoniously.

As we are reborn in the inner world, the Spiritual School offers to serve and guide us by means of its living body. It pulls us, magnetically, into its Mystery.

Secondly: In return this School trusts us entirely, in the measure wherein we allow the depth of our search to descend into our personal deepest primeval origin. The primeval origin, the Ungrund, where we no longer experience the positive and negative, the fires of mercy and resistance as terrifying limitations, but as the manifesting forces of creation. Who looks into that mirror sees the Deity and the eternal Source of Power, which also burn within him.

Thirdly the new idea dawns on us that this exceptional earthly life is here to overshadow us, within and without, above and below, entirely in the miracle of the kingdom which, as we now know, is threefold, as our soul, our microcosm is threefold.

It is an eye, that perceives.

It is a spirit, which guides and leads

and it is a mirror of all the forces in the world.

Recreate the world, your world, with the help of the threefold magic of the kingdom. Make your life complete. Not at a later date, not at any other place, no, in the eternity that is today. And know: there is a star from far away, burning in peace that watches over you. ★



Those who think that wisdom is nothing more than that which can be understood by the mind, and that happiness is nothing more than what can be achieved, are still far removed from the true, eternal and infinite wisdom. The highest wisdom is to know... that the things that are not attainable for the intellect can still be attained in a manner that completely surpasses any intellectual understanding.
Nicolas de Cusa

There will be an extended article about Nicolas de Cusa in the next edition of Pentagram.

Accompanying the world images

"My landscapes to date show combinations of land and industry in all of their complex and layered meanings, like the unintended consequence of the human impact on a vulnerable environment", says Philip Govedare. His paintings are both a reaction to and an interpretation of the world. In a mixture of beauty, anxiety and doubt his "Skies" and "Excavation" show a picture of the past and at the same time a projection into the future. I am worried about the state of the landscape and nature in our world. My landscapes also try to provoke a reaction from the public."

Philip lives and works in Seattle, USA.
www.philipgovedare.com

LAMBSPRINCK
NOBILIS GERMANI PHILOSOPHI
ANTI QVI LIBELLVS
De
LAPIDE PHILOSOPHICO,
*E Germanico versu Latinè redditus, per Nicolaum
Barnaudum Delphinatē Medicum, hujus
scientia studiosissimum.*



FRANCOFURTI,
Apud HERMANNUM à SANDE.

M DC LXXVII.

The Philosophers' Stone

From the late Middle Ages and ever since the Renaissance the alchemists started to illustrate their treatises. First somewhat reservedly and dilettante, later with ever more imagination and artistry. In particular in the sixteenth and seventeenth century jewels of alchemic engravings appeared on the book market. It was a late, desperate flowering, because a century later alchemy was rather languishing and a century later it was declared dead by the newly developed physic sciences and almost forgotten.

TREATISE OF THE
NOBLE GERMAN PHI-
LOSOPHER ABRAHAM
LAMBSPRINCK
A STUDY OF INNER
ALCHEMY FROM
THE SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY



One of these pearls is the treatise that we give and discuss here. It contains, apart from the title page and the coat of arms of the author, fifteen very beautifully designed engravings. Each displays a theme from this alchemical work. Moreover every one of these engravings is provided with a clear explanatory text that is very readable on its own and therefore a good introduction to alchemy in itself.

The identity of the author who calls himself 'Lambsprinck' is not known. Nor do we know exactly when he lived and when the treatise 'The Philosopher's' Stone' was written. We know that Lambsprinck's treatise was first written in German, and that it already existed as an illustrated manuscript before it was printed. Lucas Jennings published the text with illustrations in 1625, in a collected work, Museum Hermeticum. In that same year Jennings also published a German edition. Also Herman à Sande, the next publisher added the treatise of Lambsprinck in the Museum Hermeticum in 1677. It is this Latin edition of the Museum Hermeticum that is used for our translation as well as the English translation by Arthur Edward Waite taken from the website: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/alc/hm1/hm113.htm>. Finally, the graphic artist responsible for the wonderful engraving is probably Mathieu Merian, who allegedly made the fifty engravings of the Atalanta Fugiens, and who illustrated works of Robert Fludd. But there is no absolute certainty. It is believed that Lambsprinck was a goldsmith or a nobleman, because his family name has a coat of arms. But one can also see a symbolic interpretation of its name, likewise on the painting 'The Lamb of God' by the Van Eyck brothers, where you see the lamb displayed with the source of life in front.

The four elements

We usually depict the four elements in a traditional way as some state of aggregation, an interpretation that we also find in the *Turba Philosophorum*, the oldest known alchemic text: earth is solid, water is fluid; air is gaseous, and fire is etheric. But another interpretation is also possible, one that goes back to the oldest myths of creation. In the beginning there is chaos, usually depicted as an infinite sea, a mass of water or an ocean. From this chaos order is created by the Creator. The land and the air above it separate the waters beneath and above the firmament. The fire is formed by the sun and the stars in the firmament. Lambsprinck uses the four elements in this way in the order of his images and texts.

The editor of this article has copied the images and made them into separate cards to order them in a meaningful way. He came to the following diagram (see picture) that bears a great resemblance to the staff of the Hierophant from the tarot cards: a cross with three crossbars.

The water is illustrated in the lowest picture as a sea with two fishes. Above it a man fights a dragon. That is the transition from water to earth. The earth is displayed in the lowest crossbar. One sees three pictures that illustrate a forest, each with two animals that live on land: a deer and a unicorn, two lions, a dog and a wolf. Then follows a dragon biting its own tail. This forms the transition from earth to air. The element air we see in the two illustrations with the birds. Then follows, as the central figure in the diagram: the king on his throne. He symbolizes the crowning of the 'Lesser Mysteries' – The Small Work - and this leads to the formation of the white stone. The roasted salamander is the transition to the element fire. The illustrations that follow do not depict animals, but human figures. They lead to the crowning of the 'Greater Mysteries' - the Great Works - and finally to the formation of the tincture and the red stone, the ultimate Philosopher's Stone.

Quicksilver

Of all the metals that were known in antiquity, quicksilver, also called mercury, is the only one that remains liquid under normal ambient temperature. It is unstable, it pulls together into globules if poured onto a smooth surface and it vaporises quickly. In alchemy quicksilver is the basic raw material of all metals, due to the fact that metals typically melt at high temperatures and then take the form that quicksilver already has at ordinary temperatures. In alchemy the essence of quicksilver is the rapid exchangeability between dissolution and solidification- it is volatile as well as solid. Many metaphors are associated with this peculiarity. The volatile raises up, spreads itself, is centripetal, and centres itself. These properties make them a very useable metaphor for the psychic life. It symbolises the two aspects of consciousness. On the one hand, it denotes a complete absorption, getting lost in a perception, On the other hand a concentration and a fixation on that perception.

If we succeed in bringing together these two seemingly opposite aspects of consciousness it creates a synthesis between instinct and intuition, between feeling and thinking. Being completely absorbed in a perception and at the same time retaining a

THE
GREAT
WORK

THE
SMALL
WORK



15
red stone

14
tincture

11-12-13
quinta essentia

10
FIRE

7-8-9
AIR

6
white stone

3-4-5
EARTH

2
putrefaction

1
WATER

concentrated and subtle impression may, as by a miracle, reveal in us a region, open an inner space where we can abide spiritually. Such a space is full of meaning but without words, somewhat like a lucid dream. It is more than an insight - it is inspiration. We can draw from it as long as we can hold on to it. It is a subtle process not to be distracted by images or associations of ideas, otherwise the source is shut and the inspiration disappears. It is the art of learning how one can open those sources of inspiration and retain them in order to discover which regions they unlock.

The principle of collecting inspiration from various sources and their capture in a fixed idea is the principle of the formation of the 'Philosopher's Stone'. Mercury is hermaphroditic, it has a double nature that is expressed in the concepts 'sulfur' and 'mercur' or 'sol' and 'luna' or 'man' and 'woman' or 'fire' and 'water' or 'soul' and 'spirit'. Quicksilver is hermaphroditic because its essence consists of a certain sensitivity of perception, the mercur, and a fixed core of understanding, the sulfur, in which and around that which is observed, the inspiration, is centred, held in place and brought to a specific form, the salt. Without such a fixed core of understanding on which attention is focused, the intuition vaporizes and is of no further use.

Thus mercur, sulfur and salt form the basic components of quicksilver. We will see this theory often in the treatise of Lambsprink. The symbol for quicksilver is the sign of the planet Mercury. It is composed of three symbols above each other: a moon lying on top of a sun with a point, above a cross. The moon that points upwards as an open bowl depicts the recipient, the open principle. It is called mercur in alchemy. It is usually volatile or a liquid. The sun, a circle with a centre, is the principle of the concentration, of the 'point focus'. In alchemy this is sulfur. It is linked to heat and fire and solid and tenacity. The cross is the salt. It is that which forms and crystallizes under the influence and cooperation of the mercur and sulfur. In this way mercur, sulphur and salt together form a trinity that we call quicksilver. It is, together with the prima materia, the basis for the 'Philosophers' Stone'.

Here we see depicted the Monas Hieroglyphic of John Dee. For him this was the symbol of the synthesis of the alchemic work but also much more than that. Once again we see here the symbol for Mercury with underneath it the symbol of Aries, a fire sign. Moon, sun and cross form the hermetic vase, in which the work of the transmutation takes place, with the fire underneath.

Prima materia

It is difficult to explain what the prima materia is. It is described as something of little value, an everyday thing that is found in the street. And yet this is the most precious thing there is. It is chaos at the start. One must descend deep into the bowels of the earth to find it. It is something that you overlook, in deeply poetic terms: 'I am a grain of sand on an eternal shore'. The consciousness is on the border of sensitivity and awareness. Where life adapts itself to matter. And where consciousness and awareness, that is: the spiritual or inner side of life, turns into matter, the outer side. It is a deep, instinctive level, described as the first impression that the world makes on us, when we first see the daylight. That deep, instinctive level is like a sea in which our ordinary consciousness drowns after it has captured a last glimpse of perfect awareness. That beach, or that eternal shore with that grain of sand, lies somewhere deep in the

abdomen, as a spark of life, of deep ineradicable vitality. It is the turning point of the metabolism, where matter is converted into life, into an organism. As experience it is a form of intensity, sensitivity, vitality and also unrest. For the consciousness it is the perplexity. It is the deepest point of our incarnation in a body.

The Sea is the Body, the two Fishes are Soul and Spirit

1

The Sages will tell you
That two fishes are in our sea
Without any flesh or bones.
Let them be cooked in their own water;
Then they also will become a vast sea,
The vastness of which no man can describe.
Moreover, the Sages say
That the two fishes are only one, not two;
They are two, and nevertheless they are one,
Body, Spirit, and Soul.
Now, I tell you most truly,
Cook these three together,
That there may be a very large sea.
Cook the sulphur well with the sulphur,
And hold your tongue about it:
Conceal your knowledge to your own advantage,
And you shall be free from poverty.
Only let your discovery remain a close secret.



Lambsprinck calls it a sea with two fishes. The fishes are the two centres of consciousness in an ocean of the unconscious - spirit and soul in an elementary stage

At the moment we are born, everything is present: the world, the universe. We perceive it in its totality and without restriction. All influences, from close by and from afar reach our completely open consciousness at the same time. But we cannot comprehend it, because we have

nothing yet in which to contain it. There is only the fully developed sympathetic nervous system, which regulates the basic functions of our body, which can react.

That changes quickly by our nutrition and education. Jugs and pitchers are handed to us in order to collect what we perceive. By these restrictions we are able to contain and order our perceptions, first and foremost what is in our direct environment. But the first complete total

impression gets lost. In the first place by our education but further on the way also by frustration. Life deceives us. Our trust is violated, our love hurt, our natural security broken down.

Our ability to catch 'first impressions' is encapsulated. These impressions are enshrouded by a toad or a dragon of latent stress that is

formed within us and nestles in our bodies and our guts. What was first a source of inspiration and creativity has now become a hindrance that blocks our own initiative and surrenders and enslaves us to external influences. In a certain sense branding has been applied to our centres of sensitivity - seals that are almost impossible to break. There is one source of creativity that remains functioning: in our sexual organs our creativity remains to manifest itself materially, our physical procreation remains assured.

That first moment, that first impression, is one of 'being there'. Being in its totality, as a monad, as a mirror of the universe. It is an experience into the deepest level. That is why the spiritual transformation has to start from the primal vital impression. This sits in us as a first impression, sealed and locked in by our education, conditioning and traumatic experiences. The seals of the world around us are symbolized in the

planets and therefore also in the metals. Seals are imprinted in us because we are impressed by certain powers and forces. In this way we lose our own initiative and are no longer able to form our own first impressions. They are obstacles that prevent us from seeing the light of the source directly for we are always standing in their shadow. Our 'source of life' is locked behind these seals and the 'water of life' is led through certain channels and limitations and exploited by powers which enslave our vitality for their own advantage. To free this source again, we have to break these seals. This task is almost impossible. Very special circumstances are needed to do this. We must comprehend the nature of every seal and stop the intimidation and not be impressed by it. Only then the energy is released that one can call the prima materia and that can ennoble one to a 'total insight'. Freeing oneself in this way is always subversive because it is against

the generally accepted 'law of the world' and the ordinary way of matter, as far as it imprisons us. It is necessary to go that deep. Otherwise one frees oneself from certain seals but remains exploited by others.

That 'first impression of birth' is a metaphor that everyone can recognise. As a matter of fact the conditions of that moment are always present in the here and the now. It is possible to be enlightened in that 'here and now'. Now is Here. In this moment. At this place! On earth and in my life. Eternity is the 'now' of the cosmos. Those two coincide, are one and the same. I sit between 'now' and 'eternity', with my limitations that I can transform into possibilities and opportunities, qualities of perception and openness and intelligence.

Here we refer to the distinct subtle bodies. This requires a specific inner work. This is the beginning of the alchemic workplace. The more the work progresses, the more new possibilities of feeling, perceiving and understanding arise. A language is formed that can capture and explain it all.

It is the purpose of a mystery school to create the circumstances in which people can come together and disregard the limitations of the world, so that they can be themselves and not their profession, their function or disability, special class, or whatever. Then the twelve types of personality of the astrological zodiac can express themselves freely and relate to each other as Man. That is the beginning of freemasonry.

Whoever comes to the school discards his worldly personality. He can no longer impress it on others and is no longer impressed himself. Something must develop freely from whatever arises in the group, but which also transcends the group. Without that impression everyone's intelligence and specific ability comes automatically to light: they form the basis of the possibilities of the group.

If the twelve star signs come together, no longer hindered by the intimidations of the spheres of the planets, then a radiation can take place through their circle. A purified atmosphere has appeared, in which a new radiation is tangible. This is new and at the same time familiar, because It is always present. Usually It is mixed with the impurities of ordinary life, which tarnish that subtle energy with phantasy and 'dispersion'. In her pure form that energy shows the essences of the zodiacal signs and thereby the nature and meaning of the circle. The participants may interpret what they perceive according to their essence. They are mirrors for each other and they complement each other. Together they form a complete picture of the higher worlds. If the circle is sufficiently stable, another activity starts. Another plan is shown, another direction, a possible evolution.

The Sage says
That a wild beast is in the forest,
Whose skin is of the blackest dye.
If any man cut off his head,
His blackness will disappear,
And give place to a snowy white.
Understand well the meaning of this head:
The blackness is called the head of the Raven;
As soon as it disappears,
A white colour is straightway manifested;
It is given this name, despoiled of its head.
When the Beast's black hue has vanished in a black
smoke,

The Sages rejoice
From the bottom of their hearts;
But they keep it a close secret,
That no foolish man may know it.
Yet unto their Sons, in kindness of heart,
They partly reveal it in their writings;
And therefore let those who receive the gift
Enjoy it also in silence,
Since God would have it concealed.



When the prima materia is exposed and touched, the dragon that guards it appears. This is the stage of the putreficatio, or the putrefication.

One has to cut off the head of the dragon while he sleeps, but it must still be slightly awake, because the stone only becomes 'nobl'e when a little bit of the soul of the dragon stays within it, and that is 'the hate of the monster while it feels that it is dying'. An overwhelming and incredible amount of stress and strain, the history

of a lifelong suppression and repulsion emerges and overwhelms the consciousness of the adept. The black stage has now begun. The toad that ate 'the first impression' even before we were conscious of it, now spits out the four elements which the alchemist uses to work with. Masses of impressions, images, memories, connections, insights are crowding into the consciousness. The quicksilver, the mercury, is still very chaotic and must yet be organized and tamed.

In the Body there is Soul (deer) and Spirit (unicorn)

3

The Sages say truly
That two animals are in this forest:
One glorious, beautiful, and swift,
A great and strong deer;
The other an unicorn.
They are concealed in the forest,
But happy shall that man be called
Who shall snare and capture them.
The Masters shew you here clearly
That in all places
These two animals wander about in forests
(But know that the forest is but one).
If we apply the parable to our Art,
We shall call the forest the Body.
That will be rightly and truly said.
The unicorn will be the Spirit at all times.
The deer desires no other name
But that of the Soul; which name no man shall take
away from it.
He that knows how to tame and master them by Art,
To couple them together,
And to lead them in and out of the forest,
May justly be called a Master.
For we rightly judge
That he has attained the golden flesh,
And may triumph everywhere;
Nay, he may bear rule over great Augustus



Now we are no longer in the sea, the element water. The body is now a forest on land; this is the element earth. The deer, devoted to the goddess Diana, the Moon, is the soul, the volatile Mercury; the surprise of insights, memories, and so on. The widely branched antlers are a metaphor for the openness and the outward directedness of the attention and the mental perception. If there is nothing fixed in return, then all those insights vanish like a haze, which overwhelms

for a bit but will be forgotten afterwards. A core of fixed concentration is needed now around which attention can create order and precipitate. This principle is symbolized by the unicorn. His horn is the pointed concentration around which the chaos is ordered and comes to rest. The deer is being chased by the hunters and flees away: it is the volatile principle, the mercur. The unicorn is captured by using the bait of a pure virgin. If the unicorn perceives the pureness of the

virgin he lays his horn in her lap and falls asleep. In this way the hunters may capture the beast. The unicorn is centripetal, it is the Sulphur, the fixed principle. Deer and unicorn form together the quicksilver in its first, volatile stage of the seeing, the insight.

Here you behold a great marvel — two lions are joined into one

4

The Sages do faithfully teach us
That two strong lions, to wit, male and female,
Lurk in a dark and rugged valley.
These the Master must catch,
Though they are swift and fierce,
And of terrible and savage aspect.
He who, by wisdom and cunning,
Can snare and bind them,
And lead them into the same forest,
Of him it may be said with justice and truth
That he has merited the meed of praise
before all others,
And that his wisdom transcends that
of the worldly wise.



The impact of the release of the prima materia continues in the emotional life. We see the image of two lions in a forest. The male lion is the red lion, the sulphur; the lioness is the green lion, the mercur. The lion is symbolic of the wakefulness, the gatekeeper, but also as king of the animals of an uncompromising sincerity. On this level the emotional life is stripped of all false impressions from the outside world. The total emotional life, with all its

emotions, is dissolved and as dead. That which is real and of ourselves will regenerate and sprout anew. The old emotional life, which was a vessel full of conflicting emotions, has become now a 'mind', a tranquil space where one can really 'feel'. Emotions are shut us off; real Feeling opens and is a source of perception of qualities, knowledge and fine nuances. The mind is now able to judge in all sincerity the insights and inspirations from the stage of the deer and the uni-

corn. The mind is now also a conscience.

The Body is mortified and rendered white, then joined to Soul and Spirit by being saturated with them 5

Alexander writes from Persia
That a wolf and a dog are in this field,
Which, as the Sages say,
Are descended from the same stock,
But the wolf comes from the east,
And the dog from the west.
They are full of jealousy,
Fury, rage, and madness;
One kills the other,
And from them comes a great poison.
But when they are restored to life,
They are clearly shewn to be
The Great and Precious Medicine,
The most glorious Remedy upon earth,
Which refreshes and restores the Sages,
Who render thanks to God, and do praise Him.



Mortification (killing), salification (whitening) and imbibition (penetrating) of the body united with the soul and spirit. The influence of the prima materia continues further and more deeply. The dog and the wolf represent the level of the instinct and the will. The dog was formerly a wolf, but in the course of time he has been domesticated and has adapted to humans, their living world and culture. He has become the guardian of goods and property of his master. He

is praised for his loyalty, and despised for his servility. Contrary, the wolf is the ruthless instinctive primordial nature of the human being, which eats everything, even earth when he is hungry. Wolf and dog are sometimes vehemently in conflict with each other and fight each other to the death. Sometimes man has to make heart-breaking choices, especially when he has to go against all established values and views of his surrounding environment. Sometimes one needs

ruthless courage to choose for his primordial nature. The wolf that comes from the east where the sun rises is the Sulphur; the dog is the mercur and is devoted to the moon. The wolf is, in the Siberian shamanistic tradition, the guardian of the human species and is voluntarily domesticated to fulfil his task.

The Mercury is precipitated or sublimed

6

The three images of the animals in the forest represent the element earth. The forest is the body, within which resides the spirit and the soul. The animals together form the interacting purification of the prima materia in three 'centres', the three ways in which quicksilver manifests itself: in the thinking (deer and unicorn), the feeling (red and green lion), the will (wolf and dog). Together these three centres form also a 'quicksilver'. The receiving mercur is the intelligent thinking; the ordering middle is the sulphur of the mind. The decision is recorded in the instinctive centre of the will, the salt. The three centres together form an autonomous quicksilver: a human being who has built an inner space, who has an inner working place or has resurrected a temple in himself that can function autonomously, free from the influences of the world around him. In this working place of inner life it is possible to break the seals that are placed on the soul by the archons.



A savage Dragon lives in the forest,
Most venomous he is, yet lacking nothing:
When he sees the rays of the Sun and its bright fire,
He scatters abroad his poison,
And flies upward so fiercely
That no living creature can stand before him,
Nor is even the Basilisk equal to him.
He who hath skill to slay him, wisely
Hath escaped from all dangers.
Yet all venom, and colours, are multiplied
In the hour of his death.
His venom becomes the great Medicine.

He quickly consumes his venom,
For he devours his poisonous tail.
All this is performed on his own body,
From which flows forth glorious
Balm,
With all its miraculous virtues.
Hereat all the Sages do loudly rejoice.

Mercury is in the correct way chemically precipitated or sublimed

The Ouroboros shows that a cycle is completed. It concerns a process that must perhaps be repeated several times but every time in another way. It is a cycle that takes place between the fire spewing dragon and the Ouroboros. In the gnostic sense, the Ouroboros was the world snake; the 'leviathan' that circled the material world, which means the seven spheres of the seven known planets of our solar system. Together they form the world of matter. Outside it is the circle of the twelve signs of the zodiac wherein also the earthly paradise from Genesis is situated, within it the tree of life.

According to certain gnostic traditions, man was formed by the archons of the seven planets. They made a man, a sort of golem, out of clay and matter. These creators of the lower material world however could not create Life. They had to seduce the 'true creator', the agatodaimon, with a deceptive trick so that a sparkle of life would descend in the golem that was created by them. Therefore, the man came to life, dominated however, by the properties assigned by the archons. It is the task for the adept to learn to see within himself the difference between the spark of true life and the material chains wherein the archons keep him imprisoned. These impressions stem from ancient Egypt and the rituals for the dead in which the soul of the deceased rose out of the earthly spheres through the spheres of the archons that were guarding the portals to 'heaven'. At every portal one was held accountable. One had to know the name of the gatekeeper, what he was representing, and distance oneself from negative properties of that sphere, thus breaking the seal.

*And so man goes through the assembly of the spheres:
On the first sphere he hands over his capacity for growth and change,
On the second sphere, the instrument of evil, the now useless violence,
On the third, the deceit of desire which has become powerless,
On the fourth, the outward display of dominance,
On the fifth, the impious hubris of mindless, crazy boldness,
On the sixth, the evil impulses of wealth, which now have no effect,
On the seventh sphere the lies that create traps,
And then, stripped of astral influences,
Man, cleaned of astral influences, comes
In the eighth sphere in possession of his essential Self,
And together with the spiritual entities, he sings the Father's Praise.*

The Gospel of Thomas by G. Quispel p. 182, Corpus Hermeticum 1, 25-26

The journey of the soul after death, through the planetary spheres, has in alchemy become an inner life's journey, in order to liberate oneself from the seven planetary seals.

So the Ouroboros represents the boundary between the world of man bound to matter, and the world above that, the circle of the zodiac and the place of paradise.

We hear two birds in the forest

7

A nest is found in the forest,
In which Hermes has his brood;
One fledgling always strives to fly upward,
The other rejoices to sit quietly in the nest;
Yet neither can get away from the other.
The one that is below holds the one that is above,
And will not let it get away from the nest,
As a husband in a house with his wife,
Bound together in closest bonds of wedlock.
So also do we rejoice at all times,
That we hold the female eagle fast in this way,
And we render thanks to God the Father.



In the first image of the element air a tree is pictured with a nest in it. It is the philosopher's tree, the alchemical version of the tree of life in paradise. In the nest there are two birds: one that can fly and rise to gain inspiration from the higher realms. The other bird remains in the nest with truncated wings. It takes care that the former bird will return to the nest. The flying bird is the mercur, the sitting bird the sulphur. Together they produce the philosophical egg from which the

'Philus Philosophorum', the young Hermes, the new inner man, is born. The element air opens a subtle sphere in the mental, intelligent realm. This sphere must be explored and opened before one continues working in it. To enter this sphere one has to abandon, as it were, his body; like leaving one's shoes at the door before entering a sacred place. What takes place in this space is very tangible for the purified spirit and the clear consciousness and of very great intensity. Matters

that can only be abstract in the ordinary world, become very tangible here, direct and experienced. It is a sphere of wordless intelligence. Here one learns the language of the birds. The snail under the tree depicts a relationship: the material level is a snail that slowly crawls over the earth.

Here are two birds, great and strong

8

*In India there is a most pleasant wood,
In which two birds are bound together.
One is of a snowy white; the other is red.
They bite each other, and one is slain
And devoured by the other.
Then both are changed into white doves,
And of the Dove is born a Phoenix,
Which has left behind blackness and foul death,
And has regained a more glorious life.
This power was given it by God Himself,
That it might live eternally, and never die.
It gives us wealth, it preserves our life,
And with it we may work great miracles,
As also the true Philosophers do plainly inform us.*

In this image we see two fighting birds: the red bird places himself on top of the white one. Here the work on the white stone ends and continues as the great work on the red stone.

In the text these birds first change into two white pigeons and after that into the Phoenix. The white birds stand for purity, spirituality, lightness and innocence. Pigeons have no bile and do not know melancholy which binds the soul to the earth. The pigeons are eminent symbolic inhabitants of the element air. The Phoenix forms the connection and the transition between air and fire. According to Lactantius the Phoenix resides in a place without illness, death or any other lack. There it is always green and the source of life flows abundantly.



With very tuneful melodies the Phoenix sings, from the highest tree, twelve tunes a day about the glory of the Creator and the Sun. After a period of a thousand years, the Phoenix feels that his time has come to die and to renew himself. He leaves Paradise and flies to the earth, to the land that is called after him: Fenice which is the present Syria. There he builds a nest of aromatic herbs in the highest palm, and sits in the nest to die. This process is of such intensity that

he ignites in spontaneous self-combustion. The only thing that remains is a sort of white worm; a caterpillar that emerges after three days and becomes a new Phoenix that rises up again to Paradise for the next thousand years. The Phoenix moves in the element air but develops the intensity of the next element: the fire.

The lord of the forests has recovered his kingdom

9

Now hear of a wonderful deed,
For I will teach you great things,
How the King rises high above all his race;
And hear also what the noble lord of the forest says:
I have overcome and vanquished my foes,
I have trodden the venomous Dragon under foot,
I am a great and glorious King in the earth.
There is none greater than I,
Child either of the Artist or of Nature,
Among all living creatures.
I do all that man can desire,
I give power and lasting health,
Also gold, silver, gems, and precious stones,
And the panacea for great and small diseases.
Yet at first I was of ignoble birth,
Till I was set in a high place.
To reach this lofty summit
Was given me by God and Nature.
Thence from the meanest I became the highest,
And mounted to the most glorious throne,
And to the state of royal sovereignty:
Therefore Hermes has called me the Lord of the Forests.



The completion of this part of the work is symbolized by the King, the 'Lord of the Forest', and takes place on his throne. His feet rest on the dragon, a fish serves as an armrest, the staircase to his cubical throne consists of seven steps that represent the metals. The process has gone from the black stage to the white, over the seven colours of the peacock's tail, the 'Cauda Pavonis'. These stages have been taken, the 'Small Work' has been accomplished

and the cubical white stone is formed.

The King is the central figure in the diagram.

On an equal level we find the images of the birds that represent the element air. After that follows the 'Great Work' on the 'Red Stone'.

The small work is the work of the individual on himself, the microcosm.

The Great Work on the Red Stone is now working in a wider context with the macrocosm, or with the 'higher cosmoi'.

The transition from the element earth to the element air is represented by the winged beings in the following two images (11 and 12).



In all fables we are told
That the Salamander is born in the fire;
In the fire it has that food and life
Which Nature herself has assigned to it.

It dwells in a great mountain
Which is encompassed by many flames,
And one of these is ever smaller than another -
Herein the Salamander bathes.

The third is greater, the fourth brighter than the rest

-

In all these the Salamander washes, and is purified.
Then he hies him to his cave,
But on the way is caught and pierced
So that it dies, and yields up its life with its blood.
But this, too, happens for its good:
For from its blood it wins immortal life,
And then death has no more power over it.

Its blood is the most precious Medicine upon earth,
The same has not its like in the world.
For this blood drives away all disease
In the bodies of metals,

Of men, and of beasts.
From it the Sages derive their science,
And through it they attain the Heavenly Gift,
Which is called the Philosopher's Stone,
Possessing the power of the whole world.

This gift the Sages impart to us with
loving hearts,
That we may remember them for ever.

The intensity of the fire works on every fibre, every atom, every level of the body. The body is 'renewed', recreated.

The intensity of the fire works on every fibre, every atom, every level of the body. The body is 'renewed', recreated.

We see the fierce intensity of the fire and its all-pervasive power on all levels and through all 'vehicles' depicted in the following image: an alchemist roasting a salamander in an open fire. The text describes that the salamander goes through several fires of distinct nature and intensity. Arriving at the highest level he will be beaten to death. In alchemy this is the symbol of fixation or the perpetration of Mercury in Quicksilver.

The intensity of the fire works on every fibre, every atom, all levels of the body. The body is 'renewed', recreated, or as the Rosicrucian's say: transfigured. The only thing that is comparable with that is what one calls in the east the kundalini; the rising of the energy from

the chakra at the base of the spine in the form of two snakes that go upwards and intertwine and cross each other at the great psychic centres of the sympathetic nervous system, to end in the centre above the head.

From now on the images show only human figures and no longer animals. A young king, the 'Filius Philosophorum', is flanked by the old King of the Forest and by a winged 'Mercurius Senex'. The old Mercury wants to take the young Hermes to the 'highest mountain' for an ultimate initiation. The Old King loves his son 'wholeheartedly' and does not let him go: 'Because I will die without you'. The Son breaks away from the Father, the King of the Forests, who now plays a passive role again, and chooses to follow the guide.

The father and the son have linked their hands with those of the guide

11

Here is an old father of Israel,
Who has an only Son,
A Son whom he loves with all his heart.
With sorrow he prescribes sorrow to him.
He commits him to a guide,
Who is to conduct him whithersoever he will.
The Guide addresses the Son in these words:
Come hither! I will conduct thee everywhere,
To the summit of the loftiest mountain,
That thou mayest understand all wisdom,
That thou mayest behold the greatness of the earth,
and of the sea,
And then derive true pleasure.
I will bear thee through the air
To the gates of highest heaven.
The Son hearkened to the words of the Guide,
And ascended upward with him;
There saw he the heavenly throne,
That was beyond measure glorious.
When he had beheld these things,
He remembered his Father with sighing,
Pitied the great sorrow of his Father,
And said: I will return to his breast.



In the power of the element fire a new 'inner man' emerges, a 'son of philosophers' and another fire being, a spiritual guide, becomes visible. He leads the 'son of philosophers' to an initiation on the ultimate 'coniunctio oppositorum', the supreme insight.

The Sun (spirit, Sulphur) decides to leave his Father (body, salt) and to follow the guide (soul, mercur). This guide leads him to a high mountain and shows him the greatest wonders.

Another mountain of India lies in the vessel

12

Says the Son to the Guide:
I will go down to my Father,
For he cannot live without me.
He sighs and calls aloud for me.
And the Guide makes answer to the Son:
I will not let thee go alone;
From thy Father's bosom I brought thee forth,
I will also take thee back again,
That he may rejoice again and live.
This strength will we give unto him.
So both arose without delay,
And returned to the Father's house.
When the Father saw his Son coming,
He cried aloud, and said: – (see page 62)

This new situation is comparable with the beginning of *Pymander*, the first book of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of ancient Greek texts that is attributed to *Hermes Trismegistus*. Quote: 'Once while I was meditating on the essential things and my mind was transported, my bodily senses fell into a slumber as may happen to someone after excessive feeding or a great bodily fatigue and is overcome by a deep sleep. It seemed to me that I saw a mighty being of indefinite stature, who called me by name and said: "What do you wish to hear and see and what do you long to learn and to know?" I spoke: "Who art thou?" And I heard in answer: "I am *Pymander* the Spirit-Soul, the Being who exists out of itself. I know your desire and I am with you everywhere." I said: "I desire to be instructed in the essential things, to understand their nature and to know God. Oh, how I long to un-



derstand!" He answered: "Keep firmly in your consciousness what you wish to learn and I will instruct you." With these words he changed in appearance and at once, in the twinkling of an eye, everything opened itself up to me; I saw an immense vision"

This quotation speaks for itself. The father-king is the body that fell asleep became passive. The son is *Hermes*, the observant and concentrated thinking; the consciousness that meditates over a

theme, a 'seed-thought'. And the guide is *Pymander*, who is at the same time a universal watcher over the human consciousness (man-shepherd) and keeper of authentic and true knowledge that is potentially within every human being and which discloses the ultimate insight to the questioning consciousness.

Here the father devours the son

What does this vision mean? In the Pyramander it is the creation of the worlds of light and darkness. In Lambsprinck's treatise it is an ultimate 'coniunctio oppositium' because on the top of the mountain the son and the guide see the Sun as well as the Moon, the light of the day together with the darkness of the night. In a very pictorial manner the cosmic connection is revealed to the son, and made comprehensible; how everything is connected to everything else, and how he himself fits into this scheme. In the Hermetic writings one can read what the vision of Pyramander includes. These words are of lesser importance here. What is important is the state in which the young Hermes finds himself; the possibility that he has to open his mind to receive an ultimate insight or vision. What does the vision disclose? Undoubtedly it is the microcosm and the connection with the macrocosm.

'As above so below, for the performance of miracles of the one thing.'
The Now is the Eternity. The intensity of the Now is now so great that it expands and changes into Eternity. All inspiration comes from this ultimate moment of enlightenment. With this inspiration thousands of libraries could be filled, but for the candidate that ultimate moment is the only thing that has true value.



*My Son, I was dead without thee,
And lived in great danger of my life.
I revive at thy return,
And it fills my breast with joy.
But when the Son entered the Father's house,
The Father took him to his heart,
And swallowed him out of excessive joy,
And that with his own mouth.
The great exertion makes the Father sweat.*

The father calls his son back. The intensity of that ultimate moment cannot last too long, for otherwise the physical body will die. The body recalls his 'vital spirits'. The father devours his son completely. We observe an often-recurring theme here: the outsider who carried out an unlawful act is welcomed back in the bosom of the old

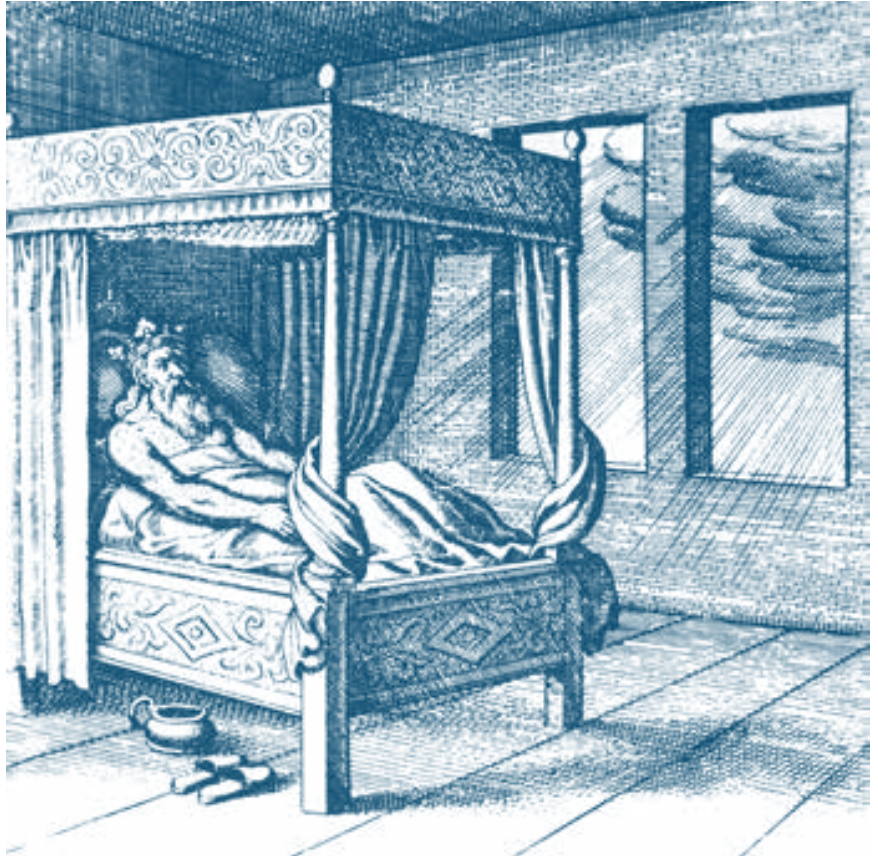
The true tincture of the sages

14

order, swallowed up and finally reborn into a fruitful and acceptable synthesis. One may also see the old king as the old tradition that is worn out and has become infertile. The son frees himself from the entrapment of the old king and thus will gain new experiences. In doing so he violates strict taboos. After a time the prodigal son returns to the father. He returns to the old tradition, but renews it from within so that it becomes fertile again and can progress. In this way a synthesis is reached. Because in order to progress a set tradition one must, paradoxically enough, inject it and revive it again from a new angle. All the material with which one might work lies, after all, in the bosom of the tradition.

*Here the Father sweats on account of the Son,
And earnestly beseeches God,
Who has created everything in His hands,
Who creates, and has created all things,
To bring forth his Son from his body,
And to restore him to his former life.
God hearkens to his prayers,
And bids the Father lie down and sleep.
Then God sends down rain from heaven
To the earth from the shining stars.
It was a fertilizing, silver rain,
Which bedewed and softened the Father's Body.
Succour us, Lord, at the end,
That we may obtain Thy gracious Gift*

Here the Father perspires heavily. From him flows the oil and the true tincture of the wise. The return of the son in the father, of the spirit in the body, has a very



drastic effect on the body. We may see the journey of the son with the guide to the top of the mountain and the vision of the ultimate 'coniunctio oppositorum' as an initiation in the 'highest and at the same time the deepest secrets that nature bears in itself'. Thus the perspiration of the Father is the precipitation and the influence of a spiritual event on the body. This influence is all-pervasive; it makes the body of the Father soft and changes it completely into a tincture of clear

water. This tincture connotes the ability of the candidate to augment the result of his work as he sees fit and 'to infinity'. It is the ability to return at any moment to the inner state of the ultimate inspiration of the 'coniunctio oppositorum' on the top of the mountain, and from there to do the creative work that is required.

Here the Father and the Son are joined as one, to remain forever 15

The sleeping Father is here changed
Entirely into limpid water,
And by virtue of this water alone
The good work is accomplished.
There is now a glorified and beautiful Father,
And he brings forth a new Son.
The Son ever remains in the Father,
And the Father in the Son.
Thus in divers things
They produce untold, precious fruit.
They perish never more,
And laugh at death.
By the grace of God they abide for ever,
The Father and the Son, triumphing gloriously
In the splendour of their new Kingdom.
Upon one throne they sit,
And the face of the Ancient Master
Is straightway seen between them:
He is arrayed in a crimson robe.



At last the father, the son and the guide sit together; in other words: the body, the spirit and the soul are seated together as completely equal partners on the throne (Image 15) and together they reign over their 'kingdom'. Together they form symbol of Mercury: the Red Stone is produced.

Needless to say, the great work cannot take place if the small work has not been brought to a good end. The small work is the work of man on himself. The

great work is the work on a greater scale that goes beyond the importance of the narrow interests of a few. The individual is linked in a wider chain of inspiration, which perhaps could call be called 'genius'.

The 'Prima Materia' with which we are dealing all the time has to do with the authentic Knowledge the 'nous' in us. Preparing for 'inspiration' is a process that can be learned. But there is no place

to learn it. One has to learn it by oneself. By developing an oeuvre, a body of work or a life work, the 'artist of life' has to open the right channels within himself and should not be carried away by the lure of fame. For 'he who measures his greatness with the muses changes into a croaking crow'. ★

What is the result of the 'Great Work'?

In our deepest instinctive layers where life melts organically with the world around us, the Prima Materia is found (Images 1 and 2). This is a powerful stream of vitality that is transformed by the special actions of the alchemist in 'Quicksilver', which gives him a 'ray' full of inspiration and provides insight into the matter from which he and the world is composed.

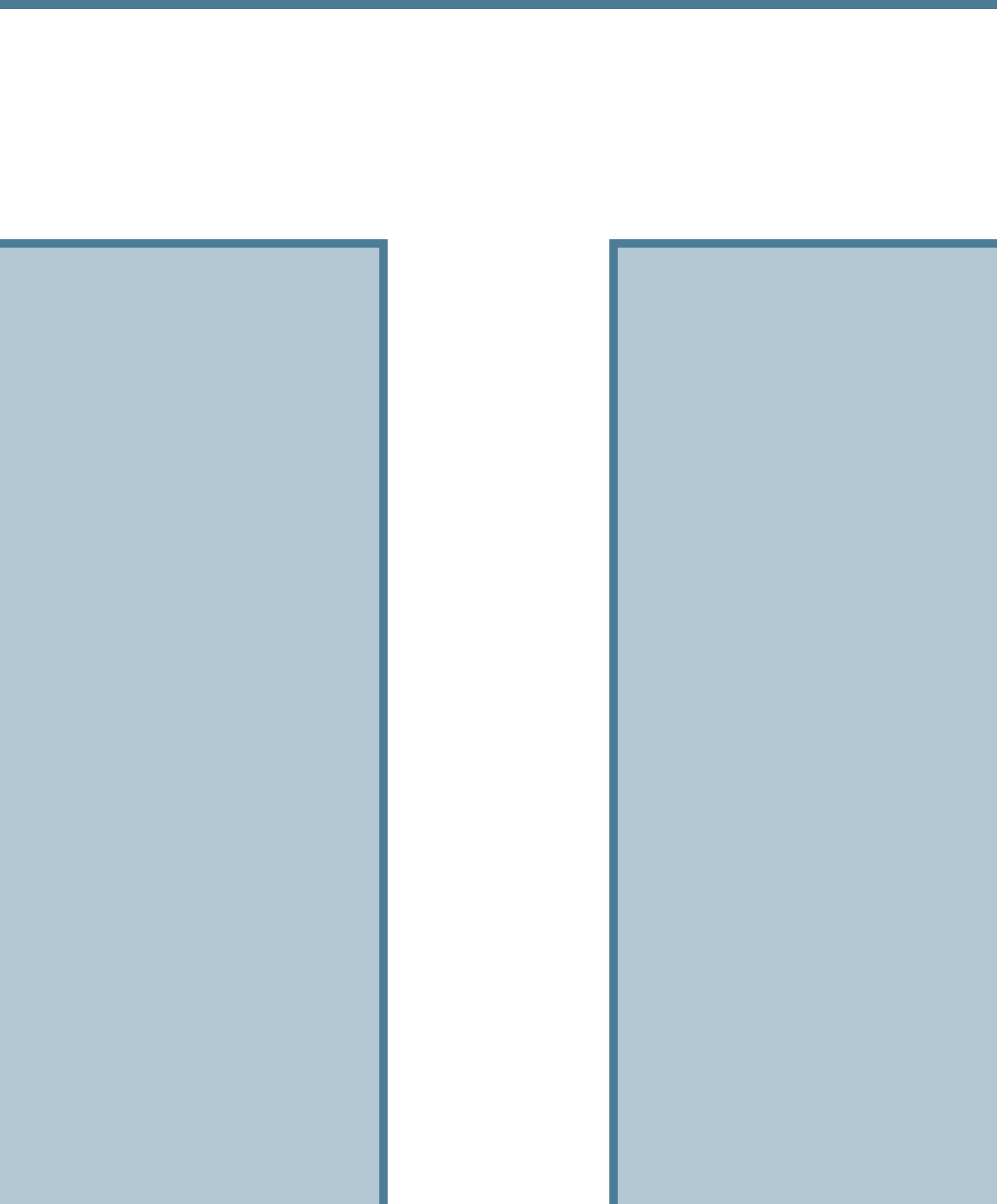
This principle of the opening of a centre of 'perception' and 'clear consciousness' is repeated several times. The Quicksilver is sublimated in the mental area (Image 3) and precipitates, purifies and opens the emotional life (Image 4) and instincts (Image 5). Thus one part of the work is completed (Image 6). The lower nature of the adept is purified and at the same time he has received insight and has control over it. The alchemist needs this control of his volitional, emotional and intellectual life in order to take the following step: the development of sensitivity and directional power in the pure intuitive realm, the air area. Here also Quicksilver expands to a sea of consciousness (Images 7 and 8).

When the Hermetic philosopher controls this power as well he is awarded the title

'King of the Forest' by Hermes (Image 9). He then has complete control over himself and the elements water, earth and air. This is the end of the first part: the "Small Work" is completed, the White Stone is produced.

The 'Great Work' takes place in the area of the fire (Image 10). Fire destroys matter and in order to gain control over fire the body, matter, needs to become temporarily passive, even seemingly dead. In the power of the element fire a new 'inner man' arises, a 'son of the philosophers' and also another fire-being, a spiritual guide, becomes visible (Image 11). He guides the 'Son of Philosophers' to an initiation in the ultimate 'coniunctio oppositorum', the supreme insight (Image 12). The son brings his experiences to his 'nether part', the body (Image 13), and as a result it is completely purified and transfigured. (Image 14).

Finally the Father, the Son and the Guide - that is: body, soul and spirit - are seated on the throne in complete equality (Image 15) and together reign over their 'kingdom'. In unison they form the symbol of Mercury: the Red Stone is produced.



The Tau cross

The T or Tau is formed from the number seven, the number that refers to the divine life, the life through the seven-spirit, and (gamma) the symbol of the earth (Gaia). The Tau as a symbol unites thus, the divine and the earthly life.

Remove the upper part from the Ankh symbol and the Tau remains. We may interpret it as the first letter of the typhon, the liberation from evil, from “Satan”. The Tau cross was also popular among the Druids. The Tau represented to them the symbol of the Druidic Jupiter. Their Tau cross was often formed by a magnificent oak, from which all the branches, except for two very large ones, were cut. From the crown of the oak tree they thus looked like two horizontal arms. The Tau was also used to act as a border sign between different Druidic religious areas.

There is also another explanation of this Tau cross, namely as a phase in the development of humanity. The first phase has no cross, only a pole or phallic symbol. It refers to the development of the abdominal consciousness – to be purely fertile while the consciousness of man was still in the dream state.

Thereafter the stake became a T, a Tau cross, as a sign that the emotional life was now awakening. It stood for the unlimited desire and following this desire, because leadership, authority, is missing. The human being cannot as yet control himself. If you observe the Tau cross you may see the likeness to person without a head. The intersection is the heart, the source of feeling.

The ‘regular’ cross that we know so well does indeed have a “head.” This represents the development of a mental awareness of the individual, which means that he is now able to make choices. The head can curb desire or direct it. The following phase is that of the “cross with roses” where the influence of the ‘rose’ or ‘lotus’ is anchored in the human heart. ★



To be a pilgrim

First there was all the toiling to set up your life adequately. Alas, the visualizations of the dream job, the perfect partner and a life of pleasure were rudely overtaken by the demon of reality. Okay, so you set your goals for tomorrow. But tomorrow never came for today stood in its way.

So you tried other directions: this way and that way and finally your own way with the step from an outer to an inner life. All your life your ego told you: when all the jigsaw pieces fit together, then you will have peace and rest. But the soul knows that it is the other way round: only when there is peace and quiet will all the pieces fit together. But be warned, at the same time the puzzle will fall into pieces! And is that what you want? Have you the courage for that? The trust?

All those around you advise you in a variety of ways: keep your feet on the ground – but that is the worst way to get moving!

Every day we receive 86,400 time units from the Bank of Life to use, and what we don't use up is taken from us at the end of the day, for time cannot be saved.

There is, moreover, a snake in the grass: your account

Miraculously, the seeker who set out on his quest is not the same one who arrives

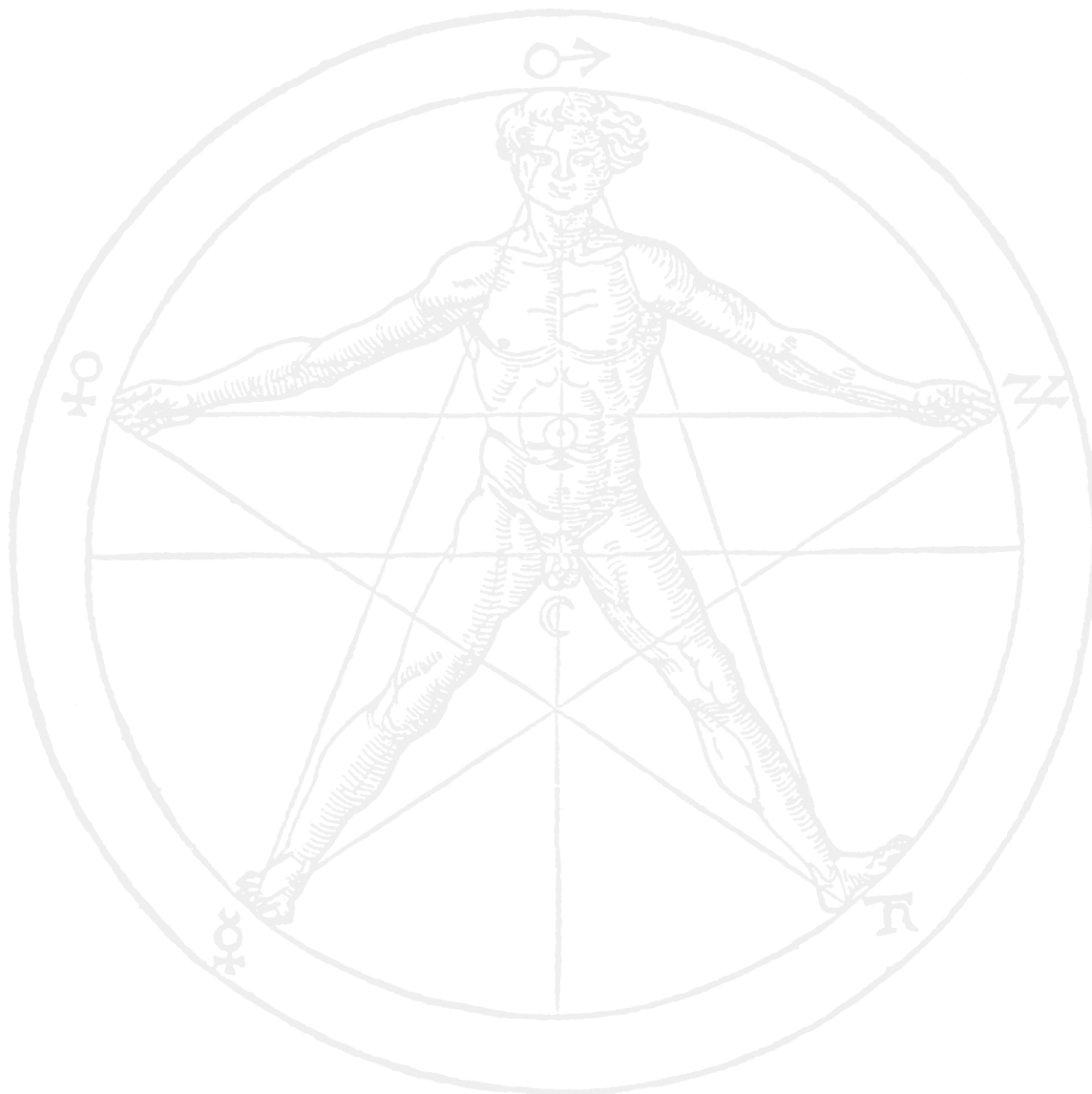
with the Bank of Life may at any time be terminated. What will then be left from the unfinished Book of your Life? If you don't set out on your journey you will only walk around and around in the first chapter which you fully know by heart by this time. So... in case tomorrow never comes, get moving today on the pilgrim's path. With a hat made out of courage, a knapsack filled with perseverance and a pilgrim's cloak woven from your yearning. "Actually I do not know who I am anymore, nor where I should wend my way" sang the troubadour Vridanc, as recorded in his *Humility* in the 13th century.

To be a pilgrim in this manner means getting lost in the right direction – living in the certainty and acceptance of an open-eyed uncertainty. And it is not the obstacles that you will meet in your inner labyrinth that will most hinder you but rather the pebble in your shoe called the ego. You seek a path, the path of which the great teachers speak, but you quickly find out that there is only your path which you hack out for yourself by going forward step by step. You'll find that it is not about imitating their lives but seeking for yourself what they sought on their pilgrim's paths. No well-trodden tracks alas, although funnily enough there are from time to time some portals on your path: the Portal of Letting Go because some things are too heavy to carry along; the Portal of Self-knowledge from which you emerge in full imperfection with the assignment to be without fear or blame for those imperfections; the Portal of Union in which is felt the aching hurting unity with humanity as well as the deep joy of unity with the All.

Seven portals – seven assignments – seven remittances – seven presents. Seven spirals upward in the quest of the pilgrim. From self to seeker, from seeker to soul, from soul to selfless Self.

Miraculously, the seeker who set out on his quest is not the same one who arrives. The path changes while you travel it, and in turn going the path changes the pilgrim. With every stumbling step you exercise your spiritual muscles. Every bridge across a ravine offers you a breath-taking view of the mountain of attainment.

And finally you become aware that the pilgrimage itself knows a transformation as well. After the initial stages of seeking, exploring the path, gaining insight and choosing your direction, now follows the stage of actually going the path with a ruthless disregard for any inconveniences you may encounter. Every step is a letting-go and every letting-go is a receiving. You lose your world and gain the Universe. ★



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